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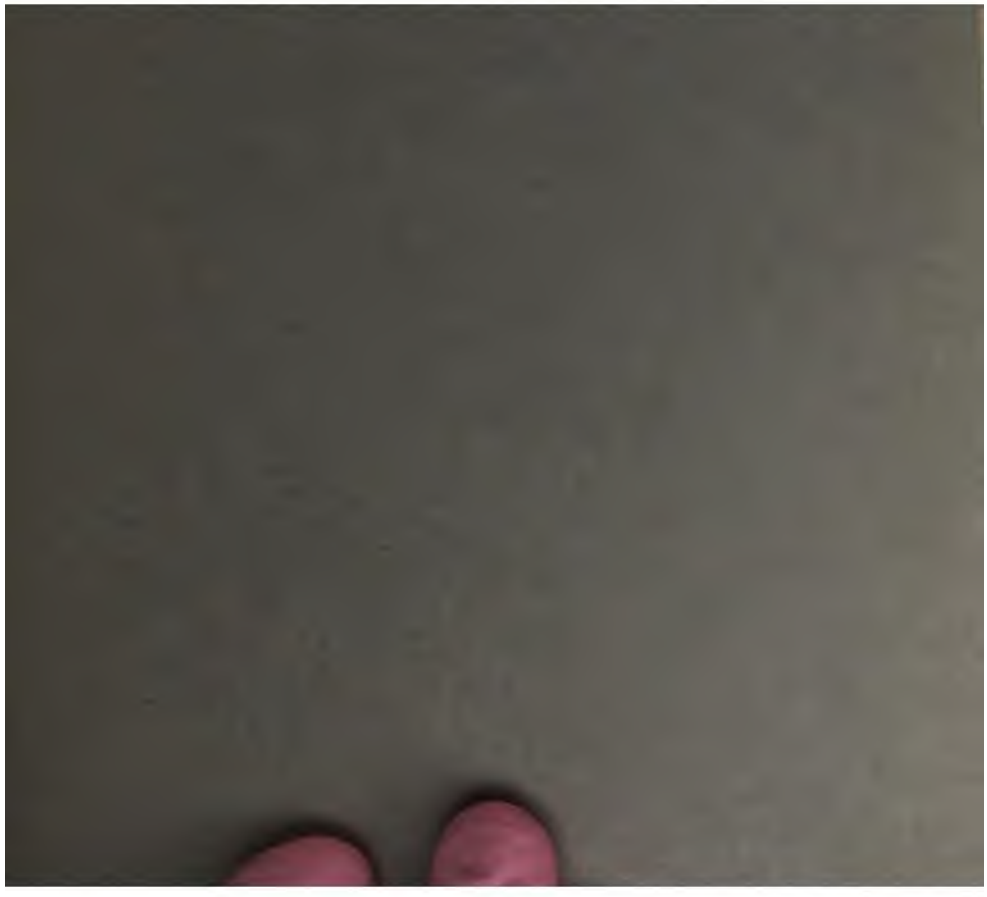
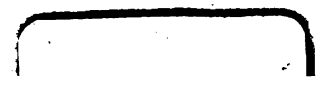
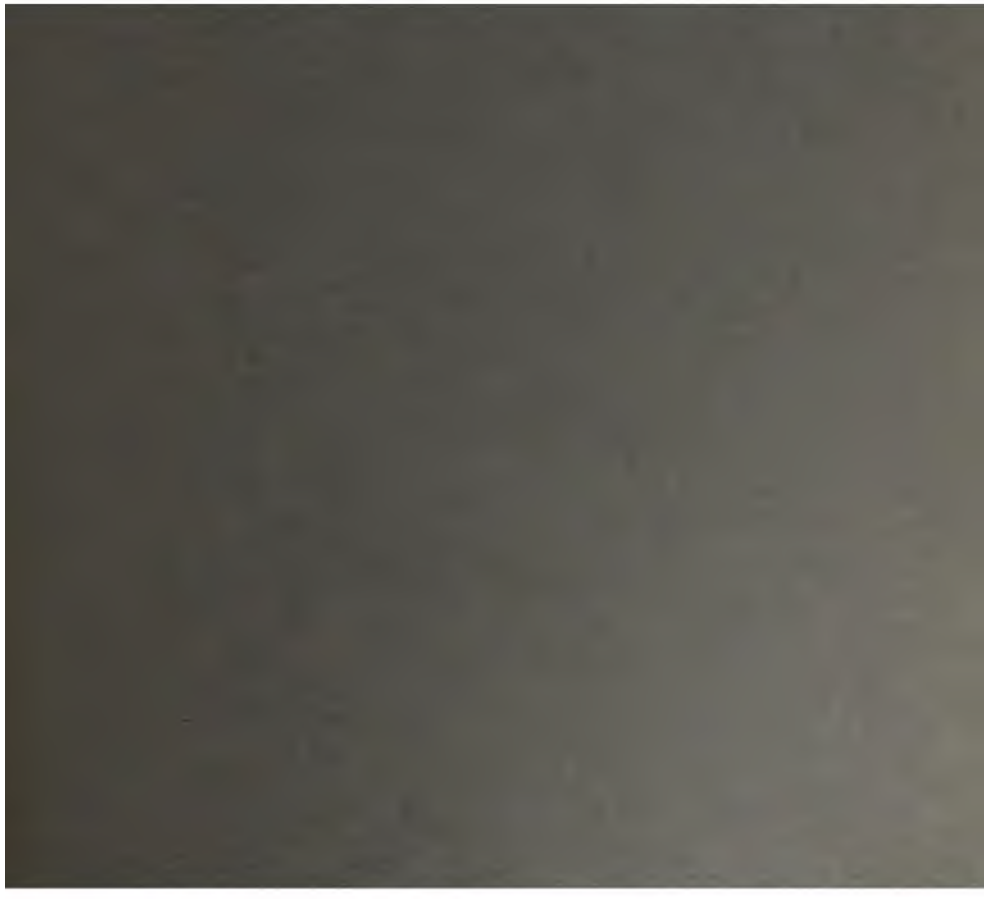


MY BIRDS

IN

FREEDOM & CAPTIVITY





MY BIRDS

IN

FREEDOM & CAPTIVITY

Quam magnificata sunt opera tua, Domine ;
Nimis profundæ factæ sunt cogitationes tuæ.

MY BIRDS

IN

FREEDOM & CAPTIVITY

Chequers Court. Bucks. *My Old Home.*

(Storks, Herons & Gulls in the garden.)

IN

FREEDOM & CAPTIVITY

BY THE

REV. HUBERT D. ASTLEY

LONDON

29 & 30 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

1900

MY BIRDS

IN

FREEDOM & CAPTIVITY

BY THE

REV. HUBERT D. ASTLEY

MEMBER OF THE BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION, ETC.

LONDON

J. M. DENT & CO., ALDINE HOUSE

29 & 30 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

1900

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TO

MY WIFE

WHOSE KEEN INTEREST IN

MY BIRDS

HAS GREATLY ENCOURAGED ME TO PRODUCE

THIS WORK

580241

MANDARIN DUCK

PREFACE

I DO not know which gives me the greatest pleasure of two things, namely, the keeping of birds as pets, or the representation of them in sketches. In attempting to be author and artist in one, both these pleasures have been mine; for in writing about my birds I have kept them over again, especially as far as those are concerned which are but memories; and in drawing them, I have been able to understand them better, and to provide myself with something in the way of a lasting souvenir. And having done so, a desire has come to me to invite others to share the delights of this experience.

Nowadays one is happy to believe that a growing interest is spreading in England for the love and protection of such a very beautiful portion of the Creator's work as

are the birds—a love which cannot but bring with it more knowledge and further enlightenment, a protection which one trusts may in due time blot out that iniquitous habit prevailing among a certain class of men, of shooting down and destroying every rare bird they may happen to come across.

The contents of this volume are not intended to treat of birds scientifically, but rather chattily, with a hope that many who would not read a learned book on ornithology will perhaps dip into what is simply a homely account of some of the birds that I have kept. People grow a little weary of discovering the same quotation time after time in so many books on birds; of what is said by Gould, and Morris, and other eminent ornithologists; weary, too, of the long lists of Latin names and elaborate descriptions of plumage, which are indeed necessary and instructive in the deeper study of the science, but are not food for all minds.

As to the rough sketches which form the headings of the chapters, there may appear to be a lack of appropriateness when, for instance, a tufted duck is found as an introduction to an account of such a totally different family of birds as are the Indian shama and the magpie robin of the East; but these chapter headings must be looked upon—like wild storks in England—as merely accidental visitors, having something in common with their surroundings, or not, as the case may be.

The true subject of each chapter is to be found por-

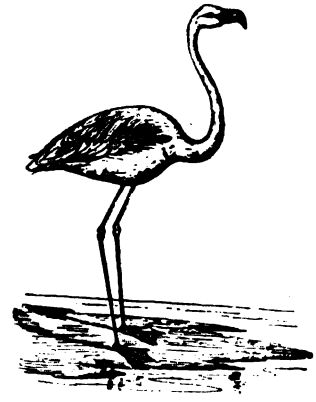
trayed on the full page illustrations, the smaller line drawings being introduced more or less promiscuously, as any bird I have kept seemed to occur to me as one that would go towards representing the all sorts and conditions amongst my pets.

To Mr. Dent I hope I may express my thanks for the pains he has taken in causing my humble attempts at bird-drawing to be reproduced in such a manner, as to almost succeed in making silk purses out of sows' ears.

I could not resist introducing as a frontispiece my beautiful old home in Buckinghamshire, of which my mother was heiress [now belonging to my brother, Mr. Frankland-Russell-Astley], a house restored *in the reign of Queen Elizabeth—who there for a time incarcerated Lady Mary, the sister of Lady Jane Grey—and where once Lady Russell, one of the daughters of Oliver Cromwell, presided as mistress. On its chimneys many a stork has, of late years, rested; and in its grounds many another of my birds has walked and flown.*

HUBERT DELAVAL ASTLEY.

Benham Park, Newbury,
October, 1900.



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PIED FLYCATCHER

CHAPTER I

BIRDS THAT COME TO OUR HOUSES AND GARDENS

"If you are not inclined to look at the wings of birds, which God has given you to handle and see, much less are you to contemplate or draw imaginations of the wings of angels, which you can't see"—RUSKIN.

BIRDS are such confiding things. They do not mind any noise and turmoil, so long as they feel that they themselves are unmolested. There they are, not only on the broad stretches of emerald lawns that lie secluded in the grounds of some "ancestral home," but even the row of villas with their humble patch of garden front can claim

Birds that come to our

its birds. Where the asphalt pavement with its passers-by approaches the country towns, where the highroad which it borders is noisy with the sounds of wheels and hoofs of horses; there, close by in the hedges on the one side, and the small patches of lilac and syringa on the other, are the birds.

"Il vit un oiseau voletant,
Hochant la queue et becquetant
Mouches sur l'herbette;
Un bel oiseau gris argenté,
De petits points blancs moucheté,
Brun de collerette . . .
Ce bel oiseau qui voletait
En faisant 'quit,' 'quit,' 'quit,' c'etait
La bergeronnette."

Of all the birds that are most confiding, and of the many that are a delight to our eyes, none seems to be so more than the water-wagtail, of which Gustave Mathieu so charmingly writes. True, there is the robin, our dear old English friend, who in English hearts has found a tender spot, which will flit about within a yard of you as you are gardening, and perch upon your wheelbarrow in which the weeds are fast accumulating, or on the handle of your spade, left for a moment upstanding in the border; and the jaunty blackbird with his golden bill, flirting his broad tail as he pauses after a quick run on the turf.

And the thrush too! (*T. Musicus*, which is the Latin for the common or garden one), he is there, his big brown eye watching for any slight movement which will tell him that the worm is within his

reach. There he is, quite close to you as you sit under the yew-trees at the bottom of the garden. Nor is he afraid to stand on his tail and indulge in a tug of war with that worm, although he has had a good look at you, and his nest of young is a few paces behind you, in the unkempt growth of honeysuckle and wild roses which border the pond where the moorhens flirt their white tails, and wend their way amongst the Aponogeton and water-lilies, whose leaves are clustering upon the water's surface.

And *you* may think the spotted flycatcher, which has taken up its position on a croquet-hoop hard by, is more confiding still, for there is much to be said for him, in spite of his lack of song and dulness of plumage. His shape is so graceful, his flight still more so; and he is such an old, old friend. Why, it seems as if he has been there all my life, ever since I began to roam the garden on legs of not two years' standing. That little lithe brown bird with the finely speckled breast, every May finds him home again. He has come so silently, without a moment's warning. Yesterday he wasn't there, and to-day there he is, sitting on the railings that divide the lawn from the rougher grass of the park, just as if he had never gone away at all, darting to catch a passing fly and back again. Let us put out the croquet hoops and sticks, if only to see our little flycatcher alight upon them during one more summer, a summer that is glorious and beautiful with scents of roses and sweet verbena, lilies, mignonette, and carnations, as

well as sweet peas in gay successive lines from June to October—a summer bright and lovely with all its depth of foliage, its skies of unclouded blueness and cloudland too, its fiery sunsets, its refreshing rains —a summer which is not altogether perfect without the wondrous procession of flowers and birds. In the borders the oriental poppies, the snapdragons, penstemons, daisies, hollyhocks, dahlias, and many another to swell the host of beauties. In the shrubberies and creepers the young of birds that flutter with stumpy tails and clamouring voices out of the nests, to swell the chorus of a future spring.

It is not very long before the flycatcher has been joined by his mate; neither does it seem but a week (so quickly do the days pass by) when one of the small brown fellows is seen to dart out from among the wistaria stems, that have twisted and twined over the porch of the front door. Very confiding of them to have built that lovely nest so close to one of the hall windows, but very unconfiding of the builder to feel that every time one passes in and out she is constrained to flit silently away, darting downwards across the gravelled terrace so closely that she surely fans the ground which is baking in the sunshine. But she will gain confidence, or at any rate courage, as she feels that those chestnut-spotted eggs are near to chipping. I have looked into the nest to-day, pushing aside the leaves as I leant out of the window. Lazy little flycatchers! The wall against which you have partly built it all but does duty for one side, so frail is the gathering of moss just there. But you wisely

discerned that, in spite of the winter storms that blew and beat whilst you were in Africa, or no one knows where, the wall has remained firm ; and, with a natural desire for the old home, you said, " We'll prop up our nest in the arms of our lovely wistaria, and the red wall shall be our buttress." And now the wistaria is blossoming, such showers of mauve depending, enhanced by stars of the small white clematis, which supports itself by clambering the stem of its neighbour.

I push aside the leaves and the blossoms to look at that flycatcher's nest. Only a foot below me, and five eggs tucked inside. She was on, and stayed long enough to turn up her head when she saw mine, her bright eye filled with a glance of timidity, and then she was gone ! I heard her sharp " Chuck, Chuck," when she settled on some bough of a tree on the lawn, and her mate joined in with sympathy. Curious mixtures of boldness and fear !

Later on the nest is pressed out of all its symmetry by the young birds when they are ready to fly. Pretty little fellows in plumage of dull dusty brown, flecked all over with whitish spots. Young flycatchers are not nearly so noisy in the nest as most birds. If only that lovely cousin of theirs, the pied flycatcher, would dwell in our English gardens as a summer visitor as generally as the commoner species. They are so local in their range, and betake themselves to wilder districts, such as Wales and Yorkshire, where wooded valleys and hill streams are to be found. Beautiful little birds, the male all white and black in conspicu-

ous distinctness. Birds that are unknown to the majority of English people. Any one having the privilege to possess Lord Lilford's splendid work on "The Birds of the British Islands," will know very well what a pied flycatcher is like on looking at Mr. Thorburn's lovely plate.

This spring I have nailed up small boxes, with a hole in one side and a ledge at the opening.

The boxes are painted green, and are placed here, there, and everywhere, some on the face of the house amongst the creepers, and others on the trunks of trees, at a height of perhaps eight to ten feet. There are several species of birds that will select them as houses. They are "to let—rent free," for the summer months, with the proviso that the landlord may inspect his property from time to time. The tenants will agree to this, if the visits are not too frequent, nor made in too much of a spirit of interference and tiresome curiosity.

Redstarts, flycatchers, robins, titmice, and a few others will build in these little detached villas, or shall we say rustic cottages? Gardeners and children, especially boys on mischief bent, must be warned against touching or peering. In our garden a pair of robins have tenanted a box which is hung on a nail to the trunk of a large lime-tree in the shrubbery. The box is just low enough for a tall person to see the shining eye of the hen peering over the edge of the mossy nest, and just for once it won't hurt to lift down the box to see its contents. How wonderfully it has been arranged, the moss and leaf foundation compactly

pressed within, and the eggs, a clutch of four, lying in the small cup of horse-hair.

Not long ago I heard of a country rector who, having placed thirty-six bird-houses in his garden, was rewarded by all but two of them being tenanted in one season. Talking of redstarts, can any bird be lovelier than the male with his black throat, the shining spot of white on the forehead, the russet breast, and the quivering tail of brightest orange-red?

A very conspicuous bird in the earlier spring, that is to say, after the first week of April, at which time he arrives from the great African continent. Very conspicuous, too, when the young are hatched and freshly flown; but after that, showing only now and then, retiring apparently into the thicker foliage of the shrubberies and woods, until he leaves us for his winter quarters in August and September.

Robins are bold indeed in choosing certain spots in which to build. For instance, a small potting-house, approached from beneath a covered way, in which gardeners are constantly working, was a birthplace for five robins in our kitchen-garden precincts last summer.

In the farthest corner of this house a brick had been dislodged from the white-washed wall. In the cavity thus formed was the robin's nest, and the birds, for the space is curtailed, had to fly past the gardeners to reach it, the nest being on a level with, and within two feet of the men's faces as they stood to their work at the potting ledge. The birds had to enter at the door, the only window being a closed skylight in the roof.

This brings me back to the subject of w
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Pied Wagtail.

This brings me back to the subject of water-wagtails. *Motacilla lugubris*, our familiar pied wagtail —"lugubris" in point of comparative colouring only —is, as I have said, one of the most confiding of English garden-birds. There are two pairs in our kitchen-garden this year. In the fern-house, or rather in a greenhouse, where the back wall is tapestried with moss and maidenhair fern, one pair of these birds has reared two broods. Entering through the half-opened lights in the front or by the skylights of the roof, the wagtails built their nest amongst the moss, where the maidenhair depended and hid it from one's view. When the gardeners syringed the ferns on a cloudless day, the phenomenon of a sharp shower around the nest must, could the birds have reasoned, have been a remarkable one. But syringing and plucking the ferns disturbed them in no way.

The other pair of kitchen-garden wagtails were still bolder. In a row of open low frames in which plants are stored, the nest was built in the centre of four miniature cross-roads where four flower-pots met. Here the gardeners were constantly working, and the wagtail on her nest was very evident to all to whom she might be pointed out. And yet, in spite of such an exposed site, one or two visitors had to look twice before they discerned the bird, so beautifully did her plumage assimilate itself with the groundwork of scattered leaves and earth, amongst which she had built. The bright, cheerful twittering song of the pied wagtail is one of the first sounds that herald in the early spring, and in March one watches the

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Pied Wagtail.

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assumption of the more definite black, white, and grey plumage of the summer months, as these fairy-like birds trip nimbly along the gravelled terrace, or over the lawns in pursuit of insects. A quick run for three or four yards, and as quick a halt, with the wagging of the long slender tail. Then the graceful undulating flight, as the bird wends his way to settle on the stone balustrade or the gable of the house.

"Polly Dishwasher" is one of the names bestowed upon him by some of our peasants. For some successive years a pair of these cheery little birds built in a hollow formed within a centre-piece of a garden fountain in the shape of three stucco dolphins, which stood on their heads with their tails intertwined, supporting a giant shell, in which sat a cupid holding a water-jet. This group was erected upon a pedestal of stone in the centre of the fountain, and that in its turn was in the middle of a Dutch garden before the south front of the house. The entrance to the wagtail's nest was by no means spacious, just where the dolphins' heads were separated from one another at the base of the group; but for all that, a wily cuckoo deposited her egg for three or four years in succession, I should say by means of her bill, in the nest.

One summer the young cuckoo was extracted and placed in a large wicker cage whose bars were separated somewhat broadly, through which we used to watch the foster-parents passing in order to feed their clamorous charge.

How individual species of a genus differ in their habits! If only the lovely and still more gracefully-

formed grey wagtail would take up its abode in our gardens, as does its pied cousin. "Grey wagtail" he is called, in spite of his brilliant yellow breast, his black throat, and his olive-green wings and tail with white edgings. It is a name which would be much more applicable to what is usually called the "white wagtail" (*Motacilla Alba*).

The *Latin* title of the "grey" bird is more appropriate, i.e., *Motacilla sulphurea.* The late Lord Lilford suggested "the long-tailed wagtail."

To find him, you must frequent mountain torrents and quiet rivers, where he builds in banks and under boulders.

So too with the yellow wagtail (Ray's). In the water-meadows amongst the coarse grasses and the golden kingcups (the marsh marigolds), with which its breast vies in hue, this bright little fellow is seen, but never on our lawns.

The swallows, on the contrary, may be looked upon as amongst the tamest of birds. I mean with regard to the sites they select for nesting. Year after year it is evident that particular pairs of birds return in April to their home of the previous summer.

I believe that they would build in the rooms of the house, if they had the opportunity.

They come to the porch, and will feed their young above your head as you stand upon the steps, and will often attempt again and again to build after the former efforts have been removed, through your careful consideration of the desirable cleanliness of the chief entrance to your home. And when you have driven

them from one corner, the sparrows, about whom we will refrain from writing much, will treat them equally badly in another.

Of course sparrows are a plague and a nuisance, but I cannot help being attached to their homely chirping.

If sparrows could become hoopoes, or anything else in the way of a bird that is insectivorously useful, what a much more preferable arrangement it would be!

Why should the commonest be the plainest, and the most songless? And what difficult birds to put out of the way! I remember, after catching a cock sparrow in a basket trap, and knocking him violently on the back of his poor head, how I flung him down as a corpse, only to see him jump up in about ten minutes and flutter away.

I beheaded the next one!

It is one of the chiefest joys of life to hear the warbling of swallows for the first time in the year, upon some bright sunny day in capricious April, after three or four weeks of March winds. The swallows are back once more, and spring is coming with the scent of hyacinths and the glory of flashing tulips. A thousand blooms of many-tinted narcissi are pushing themselves through the turf in the orchard and the "rookery"; the cuckoo's notes will soon ring out.

When the house-martins select a house for their summer haunt, no birds give a more cheerful appearance to a place, be it a farm isolated in dewy meadows, or in a quiet sleepy country town, in which on a hot day the graceful flight of the little white-footed martins

goes far towards enlivening the dulness of the High Street. They wheel backwards and forwards. They settle on the road to collect the mud for their wonderful nests after a thunder-shower has pelted down. Their snowy tail coverts really glisten as they shoot rapidly away.

And there in long rows, under the broad eaves of some quaint red-brick house, with its tiled roof and its white-edged windows, they plaster their mud huts and line them with feathers. In building their nests they use straggling stems of hay or straw, which sometimes depend from between the layers of encrusted and hardened mud.

When the young are hatched the parents flit to and fro from early morn till sunset, incessantly bringing the flies without which they would perish.

Sites that one would think they would choose they pass by, and if the martins do not honour my house with their presence, I envy an aged lady down in the village, under the thatched eaves of whose white-washed cottage there are ten or a dozen nests. As she sits in her doorway with her lace pillow on her knees, her broad-brimmed spectacles perched on her nose, and her cat snoozing in the rays of the western sun, the bobbins clicking swiftly under horny but deft fingers, she is the centre-piece of so peaceful a scene, that one's feelings of envy seem to creep beyond the coveted martins. For the old lady looks happy. The deep furrows of age upon her face have formed themselves in wrinkles, significant of a peaceful heart and of troubles lived down. There are no stern lines to draw

down the mouth with a sulk and a snapping-to; nor is the brow, furrowed though it be, repellent with a hard-set frown. Her little garden is aglow with white lilies, sweet williams, pansies, and snapdragons; and the porch under which the owner is sitting is made beauteous in a tangle of honeysuckle and sweet jessamine. Old "Fanny" is a spinster. Yet there are letters of faded ink within the brass-bound chest that would show how, long, long ago, her "young man" had courted her. But sailors marry the sea, and the sea will not always relinquish her claim to hold those betrothed to her. And so Old Fanny sits making her lace, and the martins return every year, but her sailor never comes with them, and never will till the sea gives up her dead.

Perhaps she loves the house-martins more than one thinks for. Old friends they are to her. They have built under her eaves as long as she can remember, and who can tell what they have seen, as they winged their flight above the ocean at the season of autumn gales?

Dear little birds they certainly are, with their twittering calls and their glossy coats of burnished steel picked out with snowy white.

Neither must we forget the more modest denizen of our gardens. I mean the misnamed hedge-accentor. He isn't a sparrow at all, yet "hedge-sparrow" he is invariably styled. A quiet little brown bird who is resident all the year through, with a bright melodious song of no great compass, which he pours out when winter days are mild and few rivals are about to drown

his music. A "hedge-sparrow's" mossy nest, hidden low down in some evergreen shrub or ivy stump, is a real joy to find, with its complement of brilliant turquoise eggs. One wonders at so sombre and retiring a bird being able to thus decorate its nest with such vividly coloured shells. The hedge-sparrows do not hop about the lawns with the boldness of thrushes, blackbirds, and robins; but generally keeping nearer to the bushes, seem to apologise for their presence, and quickly disappear.

Chaffinches are very bold, half walking and half hopping with nodding heads in front of the windows, even in summer time, and then flitting off with white-banded wings, uttering their call note of "Pink, Pink."

The cock bird is very handsome with his blue-grey head, his breast of dull pink, his greenish back, and white conspicuously marked wings and tail.

Could *any*thing in bird architecture be more lovely than a chaffinch's nest. A perfect lichen-covered cup of moss, bound tightly to the twigs of some overhanging branch; the eggs within, thickly spangled with chocolate spots and specks, upon a creamy ground.

There are many other birds less conspicuous and more timid, usually to be seen or heard in our English gardens.

Late in March, if the spring has entered with mild still days, and the month is going out like a lamb, the monotonous but pleasing notes of the chiff-chaff are heard everywhere. It is one of the several

small migratory warblers whose presence, except for his call, is unnoticed by the majority of people. A little slender billed greenish-yellow bird with pale underparts, which flits noiselessly from tree to tree, peering industriously for its insect food. How such frail little fellows such as the chiffchaff, the willow and garden warblers, the sedge and reed warblers, are able to make their long spring and autumn aërial journeys, is all but a mystery. When settled in their summer quarters, they seem to cling to the shelter of woods, meadows, and shrubberied gardens, as if they would not trust themselves in places where a flight of any great length were necessary.

In the case of the minute and beautiful golden-crested wrens, a migration across the waves of the sea is still more a matter of marvel; but that they do so is only true, and at times pass over certain well-known landmarks, such as the island of Heligoland, in countless thousands. The jolly little nut-brown cock-tailed "Jenny" wren, seems to be a resident all the year round. He cheers one's ear with his bright hurried song, even in the depth of winter, if the weather is not too severe and the sun sends forth his rays, however feebly. In winter time, too, wrens will visit the house, tripping nimbly, but with due caution, along the window sills; sometimes venturing into a room, and often into a conservatory.

A dish of meal-worms, from which the worms cannot escape, may attract them and provide them with a good dinner, when other insect food may be scarce.

... come to our

... ...ent, we're ... finds a nest whose ... ...e, it may be in some ... ... ancient yew, tightly w... ... ...' to've concealed under the ... ... tree trunk, that only the ... ... from her nest, as you ... ...t, because its whereabouts ... ...ve would not detect it. ... ...attention. True, the ... ...'s leaves, but no nest. ... ...es are closely guarded ... ... that nearly transfixed ... ...ness so much resembles ... ...? Well, if you were a bird ... ...a time, mind! You could ... ... a good job to. See ... ...but come away now ... ...ert. In a short time we ... ... early sitting on the eggs of ... ... if we put your finger in them, or ... ... for they will be just ready to ... The ... ...way to the long grass or the ... or ... ...selves into the greatest hurry ... ...es ... the rockery, close by the tree in ... ...ey saw the light.

... ... that so brightens our garden ... ... his song is ... blackcap. About the second week ... April you will hear his loud warbling notes. ... ... he will commence *sotto voce*, to break out into ... and ... *fortissimo*. Before the leaves have grown

when for the most part nothing but buds, purple or green, are glistening in the sunshine after a sharp thunder-shower, the male blackcap can easily be seen, hopping about amongst the sycamores, thorn bushes, and laburnums of the garden shrubbery. Don't mistake for him an ox-eye or a coal-titmouse, both of which have black heads. The blackcap is a true "warbler," with upper parts of olive-grey, and under parts of delicate pearl colour. His lady's head has a cap of bright brown, in the place of his glossy black one. Where the mock-orange bushes grow in the wild garden, or the foxgloves and tall campanulas spring up in a tangle of flowering grasses and perhaps nettles, there the blackcap's nest is concealed; nor is it easily found, for if the bird flies from it when you are quite close by, she will flit away so silently and unobservantly, that you may never notice her departure; a frail nest of dried grasses, compacted with spider's webbing and lined sparingly with a little horsehair, built, as a rule, within three or four feet of the ground. Blackcaps never venture away from the thick recesses of the wild garden; yet even if those hiding-places are bounded by walls and buildings, such as are many of the gardens of the Oxford Colleges, they will take up their abode there spring after spring.

Then, too, the garden warbler, a gracefully formed little bird, with unpretentious grey-brown plumage and a very sweet though not particularly noticeable song, is fairly abundant, as is also the willow wren, a small person which builds a semi-domed nest of grass lined with feathers on the ground amongst ivy

or tangles of herbage. In appearance he is much of a muchness with the chiffchaff, delicately made.

The ubiquitous greenfinch, to my mind a plebeian bird, with his stout bill and his sparrow-like form, builds here, there, and everywhere, generally on a level with one's head, or a foot or two above it.

Young greenfinches are very clamorous and rowdy. But the plumage of the adult male is certainly handsome, the bright yellow in the wings and tail showing up well against the general dull green of the body.

For real beauty amongst the finches, nothing beats our old and intimate friend the bullfinch, beloved as a cage-bird, but detested by gardeners.

I remember how my grandmother, on entering the potting shed of the kitchen-garden, beheld to her chagrin a row of slaughtered "bullies" lying on a shelf, and how, on remonstrating with the head-gardener —an old character from Norfolk—she was placed on the horns of a dilemma by being asked, "Which dew your ladyship want, them there birds or gooseberries? for yeou can't have both on 'em, that's sartin sure."

After all, gooseberries are not a joy for ever; indeed my recollections of boyish raids amongst their bushes, with the consequences thereof, are vivid of anything but joy; and yet what fun it was, especially enhanced by the fact that the old gardener looked upon one as an enemy to his fruit, and as great a thief, as he did upon the bullfinches. It was a high-walled garden, and one day when the old jailor seemed less vigilant than usual, so that we boys had managed to have our fill, we found to our consternation that all the doors

were firmly locked and our egress barred. Once bit, twice shy! The old fellow had often tried chasing us off, only to see us disappearing round the corner, to pelt him with plum-stones if he attempted to round it in our pursuit.

This time his tactics of war were changed. Experience had made him crafty. As we stood within the prison walls, steps were heard, and voices too! The voices of those in highest authority!

He had locked us in, and hastened to the house to fetch the "Missus." Since we had been forbidden to eat the fruit according to our own judgment and responsibility, we felt proportionately guilty. Like our first parents, we hid, but we were unearthed.

I believe *I* took refuge in the stoke-hole, only to increase my punishment by reason of my brown hollands, clean on that morning, being somewhat sweep-like!

* * * * * *

Lying in a deck-chair under a splendid group of primeval yew-trees, whose giant stems vie with the cedars, I look up through the sombre tracery of the overhanging branches to the stars above, which are twinkling and shining with the brilliancy and lustre of a night in the tropics; yet it is the sky of cloudy, misty England, but one of those somewhat rare nights in August when the air is soft and warm after a day of 78° in the shade. The garden is redolent with the delicious scent of the *Nicotiana affinis*, which is grouped in the long herbaceous border on the outskirts of the lawn, their snowy blossoms gleaming in the darkness.

The birds of the garden and parks are still to the fore, although it is just upon 10 P.M., when the owls have begun to send forth sonorous and mellow notes. Quite close by in the avenue of elms, an old female tawny owl has commenced to call to her family with a shrill plover-like scream (or is it a young bird?), and is immediately answered by her mate with his Hōō!—Hŏŏ, Hŏŏ, Hŏŏ, Hōō! Apparently a rival has intruded upon his beat, for quite a chorus ensues; there are certainly three or four all in close proximity. Perhaps they are early-hatched birds of the year, for some of the hoots are hoarser than others and not so perfect in intonation, like young cocks learning to crow.

But nothing can better that splendid mellow baritone of the old owl as it rings out through the stillness of the beautiful starry night. And there! yes! I can hear a brood of barn-owls snoring in an old elm-tree in the park, where they have been hatched in a hollow caused by one of last winter's storms, which beheaded the old tree and left it splintered and decrepid.

I believe the owls would be attracted to build near one's house if, in the event of natural nesting-places being scarce, large boxes were nailed up in certain trees. They must be covered in, with a hole in one side near the top, and a platform at the entrance for the birds to settle on. Short-eared owls, which it must be remembered are not garden birds—for they frequent wild moorland—can be delightful as pets, if taken from the nest and reared by hand. An old Oxford acquaintance—an eminent ornithologist—once most kindly sent me one from Cumberland. They

have beautiful yellow eyes, and can see quite comfortably in the daylight, so that one had not to turn night into day in order to enjoy his company. My owl would sit on the hearth-rug, playing with one corner like a puppy with a slipper; or he would take up his position on the back of a chair, from which he would fly so noiselessly across the room to some other perch, that one would be unaware that he had moved unless one happened to be watching.

He would let me stroke his downy head and back, and always uttered a soft chattering noise when I did so.

Those miniature owls, to be seen from time to time in Leadenhall Market, have been turned loose by bird-lovers, such as the late Lord Lilford and Mr. Walter Rothschild. Dear little fellows are these pigmy owls, and worthy of a snug home in an old garden or park tree, rather than a stuffy and cramped captivity in the heart of the City! Moths form a large proportion of their diet, I am told, and mice also, I imagine. As to the larger owls, no small amount of the abuse heaped on their round heads is unnecessary and mischievous. Individual birds may be guilty of a partiality for baby pheasants, but that the rats and the mice disappear by the dozen in the owl's talons there can be no doubt. Those horrible, sneaking, grab-all rats have worked into your aviary and slaughtered half your birds. There is no getting rid of them. But go first to the gamekeeper and ask him what happens to the owls; tell him you *will* have a percentage spared, and *then* see whether the rats are as numerous. I expect not!

They are the best ratters in the world; and rats are, without exception, the biggest pests.

But I don't want to write about *them!* They are too ugly and destructive, and have well-nigh exterminated their smaller black cousins, who are (or were) so far superior.

If you have a pond or a lake on the verge of the lawn, so much the better, for then you can enjoy the companionship of birds that are aquatic or semi-aquatic.

Sprightly moorhens—which I have already mentioned *en passant*—uttering their musical croak, will trip about on the grass, or push their way amongst the water-lily leaves, followed by an active family of black puffballs with scarlet-sheafed bills. Most fascinating little nigger boys, now scrambling over the broad leaves on abnormally large feet, now sheltering beneath them, or searching there for insects.

And if no gun is ever fired near by, if the pond or the lake is kept as a sanctuary, the moorhens, dabchicks, and kingfishers will soon take advantage of the protection afforded them by becoming familiar denizens of a spot that without them would be lacking in life.

There, too, the sedge and reed warblers may take up their summer residence, chattering musically amongst the reeds and border plants of the water.

When once a place has been peopled with bird life, the blank that its absence causes is markedly noticeable. When I had to shift to another home, despatching a small colony of gulls, storks, cranes, and herons beforehand, the lawn of the old home

became a howling wilderness; it was like one's pet room with all the furniture gone, and only the carpet left behind: so much so, that even neighbours not exactly keen upon birds at once noticed the difference, and said that the lawn looked quite deserted. The absence of my birds to me was as severe a trial as empty bookshelves to a bookworm, almost as great a one as empty chairs vacated by friends one has loved to welcome and deplored to part with.

LITTLE CRAKE

CHAPTER II

WILD AND TAME HOOPOES

"Now Holbein paints men gloriously, but never looks at birds."

HOOPOES seem to be tamer in a wild state in Eastern countries than in Western. In Africa, India, and China they are in certain parts familiar and fearless birds, but those that migrate for the spring and summer months to Europe prefer more secluded meadow lands and woods; yet, if this most lovely bird were suffered to remain at peace as an English migrant, there is little doubt that in time we should look for hoopoes in our gardens in the spring, as we do for cuckoos and nightingales, and the rest. Not a year goes by without specimens of these birds being shot, so that it is impossible for them to make a start in establishing themselves as regular visitors. In

the Scilly Isles, every April brings with it three or four hoopoes, but passing whither, no one knows; for they arrive only to spend a week or two and are gone again, yet their passage in the vernal migration is an annual event.

In the water-meadows and rich low-lying pastures of some parts of England, hoopoes would undoubtedly find an abundance of insect food, and would also be extremely useful in digging out with their long slender bills certain grubs destructive to farming and gardening, which many birds with shorter bills may be unable to reach beneath the surface of the earth.

Any one who has voyaged up the Nile, has not left Cairo far behind before the hoopoes are evident to the most unnoticing persons.

He is a bird of such striking appearance, with his wonderful coronet uplifted on his head, the long, slender, and slightly curved bill, and the beautiful broad butterfly-like wings, banded conspicuously with black and white.

Walking through the Egyptian villages, it is an ordinary thing to see one or two hoopoes running quickly over the dried Nile mud, either on the edge of some canal or pool, or else prodding with their bills amongst the refuse that lingers lovingly but unsweetly about the mud hovels of the Arabs. In Egypt there is an abundance of beetles, which probably make up a considerable portion of the hoopoe's *menu*, but to judge by the appalling effluvia that surrounds the nest and young birds, they cannot be altogether nice feeders. Like some people, their sense of taste must be either

absent or else somewhat depraved. They remind me in this respect of a luncheon party I was once at. It was extremely hot summer weather and in London. There was dressed crab, amongst other delectable dishes! One lady guest seemed to be enjoying it so much, that when it came to my turn, I too helped myself. One mouthful was not only quite enough, but too much. I looked round the table; three other guests appeared aghast, portions of the crab untouched upon their plates.

"Isn't the crab good?" said the hostess. As no one else spoke, I ventured to say, "Well, I think crabs are very difficult to keep *quite* fresh in this sort of weather, and fishmongers are not always to be depended upon." My hostess at once turned to the lady whose appreciation of decaying crab had beguiled me into tasting it, and said, "Pray don't eat it." But she was too late, for, like the walrus and the carpenter with the oysters, she'd eaten every bit, and (perhaps with due consistence) stuck to it that *her* helping was *quite* good; yet it was all part of the same old crab!

As with people, so with birds; there are some who prefer freshly killed food; there are others who don't object to its being decidedly tainted, and hoopoes are perhaps to be numbered among the latter.

I hold to this because, when a brood of young hoopoes was brought to me by an Arab boy at Assouan, that brood nearly knocked me backwards. But in three days' time, after they had been fed on clean and fresh food, this disgusting smell had all but faded away, and all young hoopoes that I have ever

come across have equally affected the olfactory nerves.

When our dahabeah was moored opposite Assouan, below the first cataract of the Nile, to a sandbank in close proximity to the island of Elephantina, I had ample opportunity for observing the hoopoes.

In the early morning, before one was properly awake, two of these birds used to settle on the dahabeah just above one's cabin window, where they would utter continually their love-song—Hŏŏ, Hŏŏ, Hŏŏ—Hŏŏ, Hŏŏ, Hŏŏ; partly dove and partly cuckoo-like in sound.

To see the male birds sparring at each other is extremely pretty, dancing in the air one over the other, like two large butterflies.

After I had managed to pick up a smattering of Arabic, I used to endeavour to make known to various Egyptian boys the fact that I was very anxious to obtain a brood of young hoopoes, having been able to utter with what I thought extreme glibness the words "Katakît hidadîd," which, being interpreted, means a brood of hoopoes; but whether these youths mistook my meaning, or else considered that a brood of any birds would suit me equally well, I know not; at any rate, for a week I was brought nothing but young sparrows, varying in age from three days to ten. It was not in vain, however, that I used to shake my head and say, "La! la! Hidhid, mafish baksheesh," by which I meant, "No, no, not that, but hoopoes; you shall have no present." Consequently the very next morning—it was early in March—as I was sitting

on the upper deck of the dahabeah under the awning, there came to my ears the sound of much splashing and yelling from the neighbouring island. Through the shallow water that divided it from our sandbank, three of my copper-skinned Arab boys were racing, one of them holding his white robe above his knees out of the water's reach in one hand, whilst in the other were three struggling ungainly-looking bird forms, which even at some little distance I saw were at any rate not sparrows.

"Shoof! shoof! hidadîd!" ("Look! look! hoopoes!") cried all the boys simultaneously, and I thought the poor little birds would have been then and there torn to pieces, for each boy tried his best to be the one to hand them over to me, with the usual Arab-like clamour, impetuosity, and excitement. Yes! sure enough, they were unmistakably hoopoes, easily recognisable even at the age of perhaps a week old. Their crests were already well developed, and the quills that covered their odoriferous bodies showed the black and white bars of the wings and the russet-brown of the general plumage.

After having duly rewarded the young Arabs, I placed my hoopoes in a covered basket lined with hay, where at first they huddled into the farthest corner, nearly turning head over heels in their endeavours to escape from my sight, their hind-quarters up in the air, and their heads, with the double row of crest quills widely separated, nearly doubled beneath them.

And their smell! Well, smell isn't the word! At that age hoopoes' bills are of course not nearly so

long as in the adult bird, and the gape of mouth, with the large yellow edging, is enormous. The only sound at first emitted was a frightened hiss; but after a few hours, first one and then another began to feed, when they uttered a jarring note, which lasted as long as they stretched up their necks and opened their mouths, with the lovely interior colour of orange-red. They were fed on small pieces of fresh raw meat, mixed with an insectivorous food, brought for the purpose in tins from England.

Hoopoes nest very early in Egypt, as early as blackbirds do in England. The first nest I came across was at the end of February, when we were voyaging between the first and second cataract of the Nile, at Kalabsheh, famous for the remains of what must have been one of the most magnificent temples of Egypt, but now in ruins from the ravages of some great earthquake, aided by Time.

Landing at Kalabsheh, and surrounded by the natives of the place, I at once pursued my search for young hoopoes, for I had not yet received the brood just described. It was fast growing dark, and we should be leaving at early dawn on the following morning, so that it was a case of "now or never." On hearing my inquiries in broken Arabic, a good-looking young man stepped out of the crowd and said, "Aiwa, henna!" ("Yes, here!") pointing with a graceful wave of a brown arm and hand towards some rocks at the back of the village. As usually happened, the whole assembly of some thirty or forty men and boys immediately commenced to gesticulate and shout at

me and each other, until I was forced to put my fingers in my ears and run.

This seemed to improve matters; for the original announcer of the whereabouts of a hoopoe's nest came after me, and plucking my sleeve, said, "Taala maaya. Henna! henna!" ("Come with me. Here! here!") as he walked ahead through a grove of date-palms, which towered up above us, and through whose graceful branches the stars were beginning to gleam with the brilliancy peculiar to an Eastern sky. Then it suddenly struck him that it was already too dark to find the nest without artificial light; so making me by expressive gestures understand that I was to wait whilst he fetched something, he ran off to the dahabeah, returning in a few minutes with a candle and some matches. Then he led me, followed in the near distance by several boys—to whom I vainly shouted "Emshi ruhh" ("Go away")—towards the rocks that skirted the mud houses of the village.

Clambering up to a narrow fissure formed by one huge boulder on another, he lighted the candle and peered in, his black eyes glittering near the flame; whilst I followed, a boy on either side supporting either arm, under the impression that I couldn't possibly manage the rocky ground without such aid.

It was evident that my original guide knew what he was about, for he at once turned to me and pointed into the fissure. With much difficulty, and after nearly frizzling off the tip of my nose, I at last discerned, about four feet in—a hoopoe. The fissure was so narrow that even she could not stand upright.

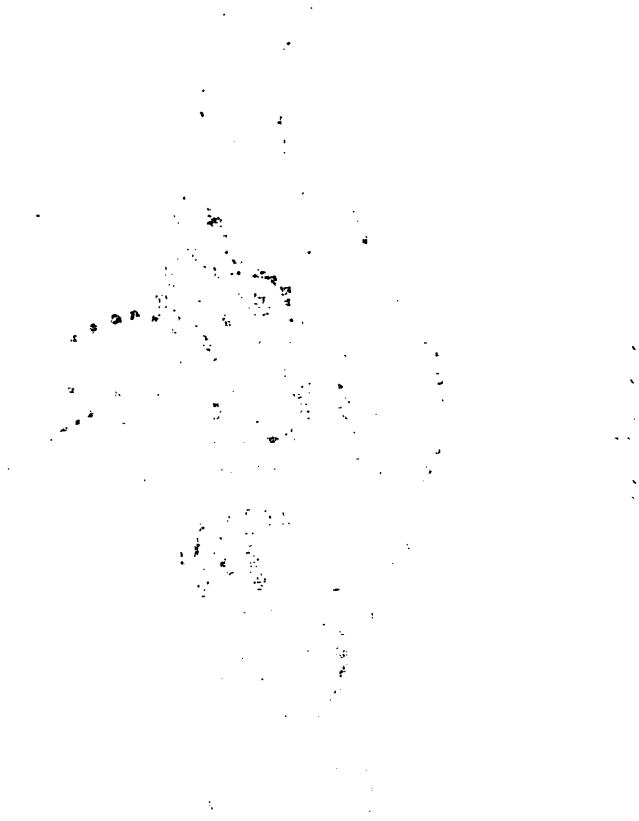
ere was such a flooring of sand and small stones thin that it was impossible by the light of one idle, which cast shadows of every shape and form, see whether there were any eggs or young ones; but ien I attempted to state my disbelief in their exist-ce, I was met by a hurricane of denials. "Young es! young ones!" At first I thought that, with the ual ignorance of the Egyptian (or Nubian) country-an about birds, he was under the impression that e undoubted adult bird was a young one, and conse-ently I vehemently denied his assertion. But no! ain he said "Young ones! young ones!" whilst the her boys caught the refrain in chorus. And he was ght, for cutting a long and slender palm branch, nich he inserted into the inmost depths of the sure, just in front of the poor frightened hoopoe, he adually, and with much difficulty, scooped towards e opening a poor wretched little bird of a few hours d, which was rolled over and over on the rocky floor-g, until it was within reach of his arm. It seemed tile to attempt to rear it by hand, and equally so to ish it back into the depths of the rocky nest; so I ok it, and kept it alive for twenty-four hours, during hich time it fed well, and really collapsed, I believe, om suffocation, having wriggled its poor small pink dy into a deep fold of the flannel in which it had en wrapped, so that its wobbly head was bent under breast. It would have been a triumph to have ared it. At that early age the fluff on the head was gely developed in the form of a crest, but the bill is quite short, as with any other young bird.

I succeeded in bringing to Cairo seven well-grown hoopoes, and, much as I loved them, could I ever go through such a business again? I think never! They had to be fed constantly, and each bird had to be taken out of the cage in turn, so that the food could be placed in its mouth; for otherwise it was thrown about inside the cage, and the birds would have ended in being half starved.

As I was staying for two days in Cairo before leaving for England, I used to allow two of the hoopoes, which were particularly tame, to fly about upon the spacious balcony which opened from my sitting-room, and very pretty it was to see them sunning themselves on the balustrade, lying down and spreading out their wings, crests, and tails to catch the full heat, until they looked, with their black and white bands and bars, like some puzzle or kaleidoscope. The cage in which they lived was an Egyptian one, made of cane, with a sliding door. With constant opening and shutting, this door slid back extremely easily, so that perhaps my horror may be imagined when, on returning from the bazaars one morning, I found the door pushed back, and all seven hoopoes flitting about in the trees which grew opposite the hotel.

Kites and wicked grey crows (the wretches!) were gathering round, eyeing my poor innocent hoopoes, some of which, highly delighted at finding themselves at liberty, were preening their feathers and erecting their crests, and looking generally perky.

That I should ever recover them all again, I



The Hoopoe.

doubted, especially as at that moment the finest of the lot took flight upwards, apparently out of sheer gaiety of spirits, only to be immediately attacked from above by a kite, which swooped at it in a most abominably business-like manner, but the hoopoe gave a twist and a turn, and dodged that evil-minded kite, when to my consternation, and still more, I should imagine, to the hoopoe's, a grey crow dashed up from below. This was a mean manœuvre, for he thought, "That bird shall be made mince-meat between me and the kite ; we'll sandwich him between us."

That hoopoe deserved to live, for, with another twist, he fled into an acacia tree close by, and put up his crest at his enemies, in much the same manner as a London street Arab would put up his hand to his nose on escaping from the claws of two policemen.

It was warm work for a minute or two.

As to those grey crows, they are real villains, for the next day they did their utmost to work their revenge, actually daring to hop with a great sidelong awkward hop on to the balcony, where, whilst one worried those poor hoopoes on one side of the cage, the other seized a wing and a tail that for a moment showed themselves between the bars, and, with a savage tug, tweaked out a large beakful from both.

This attack I witnessed from my bedroom window, and those crows, although they saw me, knew perfectly well that they would have time to carry out their wicked designs before I could dash on to the balcony. It was fortunate for them that I couldn't get at them ! By the time that the hoopoes were thoroughly hungry,

one after the other flitted across the street and returned to safe quarters.

There were two that were especially tame, and these were let out every day, but even they sometimes played the truant.

One morning they had sat for a long time in one of the acacia trees that grew in the street just in front of the hotel, and immediately under the big balcony, where the cage always stood.

I whistled and whistled, and must to passers-by, who couldn't see the hoopoes in the tree, have looked most idiotic, hanging over the balustrade. I was wishing to get the birds back, as I wanted to visit the bazaars, and the morning hours were flying. At last one of my birds left his branch and flitted up towards me, but instead of coming to his cage, took up a position on a narrow ledge just above a window that overlooked the large awning of the balcony.

In order to let the bird see me, I had to get on a chair, and peep over the outer edge of the awning.

As I did so, I whistled again, and said, "Come along, you *bad* thing;" when to my consternation I found myself apparently addressing a rather stout and severe-looking English lady, who of course couldn't see the hoopoe above her head, and who was seated at her open window immediately facing me!

I had bobbed up serenely from below, and before disappearing in confusion, had time to catch an indignant glance, and to see her rise up hurriedly and back into the recesses of her room, away from such a forward man.

How I looked tremblingly round the dining-room at *table-d'hôte!* But I *fancy* she either changed her hotel immediately, or else fled to Alexandria, probably going home to England with the idea that Englishmen in Cairo are by no means to be trusted, "and a clergyman too!"

Another day, one of my hoopoes sat so long in the sunshine on a lower branch of one of the trees already described, that I thought he would be more likely to come to me if I descended to the large public balcony that opened out from the flight of steps leading into the street, where I should find myself nearly on a level with my bird.

Directly he saw me, he flitted on to my shoulder with upraised crest, much to the astonishment of a party of visitors to the hotel, who had just dismounted from a carriage and were ascending the steps. They evidently were puzzled, for apparently a wild hoopoe had suddenly been "willed" by my whistle to come to me.

The hardest part of all came when I returned to England. I had to take my passage from Alexandria on board a "Messagerie" boat, because at Cook's office at Cairo I was told that the English boats would not allow birds to be numbered among the passengers.

Moreover, I had two young Dorcas gazelles with me —"Quaiss" and "Shamadana"—as well as a pair of young Egyptian turtle-doves and two little spotted crakes, which were brought to me at Philæ by some Arab boys.

In a cage made with partitions, I managed to stow away all my birds, and to smuggle them as quickly as

possible into my cabin, which on account of the birds, I had secured to myself; for I had a suspicion that although birds were allowed on board, they might not be permitted in the cabins. My suspicions were verified after we had been steaming towards Marseilles for two days.

The captain, a jolly-looking old Frenchman, stopped me in a promenade on the upper deck, and, with a somewhat severe tone and scarcely a bow, said, "On dit que Monsieur a des oiseaux dans sa cabine, il faut les mettre avec les quailles."

I tried to smile sweetly, and, in what I hoped was a wheedling tone, explained that they were in a cage "tout petit, tout petit;" that I had paid double for my cabin; that they were in no one's way; that I had brought them all the way from Assouan, and had to feed them every two hours. The only answer I received was a thoroughly French shrug of round shoulders, and, with a by no means benign expression, the captain turned on his heel.

But my hoopoes remained in my cabin for all that! I felt *exactly* like what Lord Salisbury must have felt after retaining Fashoda!

And this feeling was enhanced when I again won the day over the gazelles.

At first I had managed to have their crate put in a snug corner on the lower deck, near the furnaces; for they felt the increasing chilliness of the sea-air considerably after the heat of Assouan and the warmth of Cairo; and poor little "Shamadana"—a baby-boy of a gazelle—was especially humpy.

I was most anxious about him from the fact that he did not belong to me, but to my sister-in-law, who was to travel home by a more circuitous route. But alas! that tiresome old captain discovered the whereabouts of the gazelles, and promptly ordered them to be put in a filthy cage on the deck of the third-class passengers, where everything was smelly, dirty, wet, generally nasty, and un-English, as far as a passenger boat was concerned.

To get to them, I had to step over the reclining bodies of quantities of Greek peasants, who lay and sat there day and night, men, women, and children, all muddled together, continually playing cards, with packs as dirty as themselves.

Here too were the quails, which the captain thought might be companions to my hoopoes.

They were interesting in more ways than one, but especially so because they were the last consignment that were to be allowed to be imported to France from Egypt, and would be landed a day before the new law was to take effect.

Thousands of these poor little birds, which are caught on the north coast of Africa when migrating to Europe in April, would, if not intercepted, duly land in France, and France would benefit accordingly; hence the new law that Egyptian quails are for the future forbidden.

There were—so they said—60,000 on board the boat I was on; and 60,000 quails, closely huddled together by fifties in low canvas-roofed cages, which are not cleaned out, can smell rather strong, with a

nasty, sickly, mawkish odour, which used to be wafted all over the vessel at times.

The new regulation with regard to their importation from Egypt may possibly make some difference in an increase of wild quail in England during the summer months; for thousands that would be caught round Alexandria and other places will now be allowed to continue their migration to France and Italy; some of which, escaping capture in the latter countries, may perhaps find their way to England.

How birds that are caught by thousands and thousands every year, on their way to their breeding quarters, manage to keep up their numbers, is a mystery.

It would be very pleasant to hear the musical note of quails in our English pastures and cornfields, as one hears them in Egypt amongst the fields bordering the Nile, where they are often within a few feet of one, hidden amongst the rich green of the young wheat and barley.

To catch such a sporting little game bird as a quail in nets by night, when the poor little chaps are wearied out by their long flights, seems a mean kind of a trick, just for the sake of putting some money into people's pockets, and for gratifying the palate of the Upper Ten, for the most part.

I shall mention these little fellows again in another chapter, when writing on cruelty to birds.

I do not know whether the *English* Government has forbidden the importation of quails from Egypt, but it would be a very merciful action to take, for they are terribly cramped and crowded in the voyage.

All this is a digression from the immediate subject of the chapter.

For all that, let me once more make mention of the gazelles, for they are so intimately connected with my hoopoes in their travelling adventures.

His Highness Prince Mahomet Ali, the Khedive's brother, was on board the steamer, and he, as well as Mdlle. de Lesseps, having caught sight of the baby-gazelles, at once felt pity for them in their draughty and cold position.

"Why were they put in such a spot? They would infallibly succumb."

Hearing that it was by the immediate orders of the captain, and much against my wishes, Mdlle. Hélène de Lesseps, to whom I am ever grateful, at once interceded on their behalf; the consequence of which was that the captain had to give in, and allow them to be placed in their crate on the upper deck, in a cosy corner near the engines, where there was a warm atmosphere.

He looked rather grumpy when he met me after having given the order, and I felt "Fashodaish" once more! An Egyptian Prince and a De Lesseps had proved too much for him, and the "gauche Anglais" won the day.

Not, however, without cost; for poor little "Shamadana" had contracted a cold in his third-class quarters, and died about a week after his arrival in England; partly, however, perhaps, because he and "Quaiss"—who has flourished—were delayed at Calais until leave had been granted by the authorities of the English

Board of Agriculture to land the gazelles—cloven-footed animals—at Dover.

My hoopoes, after much trouble in feeding them, were brought safely home, and, as soon as the weather became warmer, were placed in a small outdoor aviary. After a week or so, I ventured to open the door and let them fly loose in the garden, and it was the prettiest and most uncommon sight to see seven hoopoes flitting along the terrace towards me when they spied the tin of meal-worms in my hand. Gradually they found their way all round the garden immediately surrounding the house, but, curiously enough, never seemed to trust themselves out of its sight.

Very quickly their natural instinct taught them to prod with their long bills—which had lengthened to almost full growth at two months old—in the turf of the lawn ; and it was very interesting to notice their movements when a grub was felt an inch or more beneath the surface of the ground, showing that the tip of the bill must be extremely sensitive for this purpose and furnished with nerves.

When once a hoopoe commenced to dig with quick hammering movements, a large brown grub was almost sure to be pulled out, to be knocked about for a few seconds and then swallowed ; the bird throwing his head back, opening his bill, and chucking the insect deftly down his throat.

People's astonishment was great when I walked them round the garden. If the hoopoes were out of sight, I used to whistle, and almost immediately they would come flitting to within a few yards of me, erect-

ing their crests as they settled, and then running quickly along with their short little legs, their heads nodding as they ran. They were most charming pets (I say "were," for alas! they are all dead), for they seemed to have no fear, and, with the full liberty of wild birds, were absolutely tame.

The housekeeper used to feed them from the window of her room, and they would go in and out there at all times of the day, sometimes, if the lattice was closed, tapping at the panes with their bills. Why they died is a mystery to me; for they all collapsed before September was out, and had in the meanwhile had every privilege. Magnificent weather, full exercise, natural food, as well as ants' eggs, mealworms, and raw meat when they needed it; and yet, as each one moulted, their skin seemed to be attacked by a sort of scurvy, and the new feathers dropped out when about half grown, and when still to a great extent in the quill stage.

One or two of them had fits into the bargain, and all seven died. It was most sad, but, in spite of their loss, the gain had been great. Whilst they lived, they were most beautiful and interesting. Yet, if I ever had the pleasure of another trip up the Nile, I don't *think* I would ever try to bring home any more, and I don't know that I would advise others to do so.

Yet there is a beautiful hoopoe (unless lately dead) in the western aviary of the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park, which had moulted successfully, and which, when I saw it in October 1899, looked extremely healthy.

WHEATEAR

CHAPTER III

BLUE THRUSHES

"Even as it were a sparrow, that sitteth alone on the housetop."

SOUTHERN Europe is the home of what the Italians call the *Passera Solitaria*, the bird that is credited with the honour of being the sparrow of the Psalmist, that sitteth alone upon the housetop, and his Italian name seems to bear this out. Europe is his nesting-home, where, in Italy and Switzerland more especially, the mountains tower up with the snow glistening on their summits against an azure

sky, where the precipices are capped with green table-lands, and pastures bejewelled by anemones, gentians, ranunculus, and all the other beautiful alpine plants; where cascades falling over giant boulders cool the air, scattering their rainbowed spray around, now on one side and now on another, as the wind selects to blow it. In the faces of the precipices and entrances to caverns, as well as in rock hollows, these birds build their nests, arriving from their winter quarters in Africa to do so, April being the month of their return.

A lovely bird is the blue thrush, the male being a soft dark grey-blue throughout his plumage, the whole of his head having a tint of old blue china frosted over; but this brighter colouring is more apparent in the breeding season than after the autumnal moult. About the size of an English thrush, but with chat-like manners, flirting his tail up and down. His beak is longish, after the shape of a starling, and his song is exceedingly sweet and wild, if you know what I mean. Just as some music is drawing-room music in comparison with many of the wild Hungarian compositions, so with the song of birds, some of which one associates with the dwelling-places of men and the cottages of peasants, whilst others seem to require the roar of the sea or the rush of a mountain torrent to accompany them. The crow of a pheasant, although essentially a sound of the woods, doesn't, through custom, sound nearly so wild as a curlew's cry. There is a more romantic sound in the ringed plover's pipe than in that of the bullfinch.

Sometimes in the stillness of alpine mountain gorges the whistling of the blue thrush rings out, so that it is for ever associated with snowy peaks, and edelweiss, and swishing hill streams. If you wander up amongst the rocks and then sit under the shadow of some giant boulder, you will see the Passera Solitaria, proving his title to the adjective of his name, perched on the summit of the precipice above you, or hovering upwards into the air, singing as he goes, and fluttering downwards to his former standpoint, showing off his voice and form to his mate amongst the rocks. And again you find him wintering in perpetual sunshine (wise bird) in Egypt, for thither many of them take their flight by September, to flit amongst the barren hills that overhang some of the wonderful temples of the ancient Egyptians. Curiously bold birds they are, considering their shyness in their summer quarters, for at the temple of Dehr el Bahari, the beautiful structure built by the famous Queen Hatepsu, which has been excavated only of late years, the artist employed to copy the lovely and delicately tinted frescoes told me that of an evening the blue thrushes would descend from the precipitous rocks overhanging the temple buildings, and positively mob him from all sides.

At Assouan, amongst the rocks outside the town, I saw a blue thrush flitting from one boulder to another, singing as he settled afresh, his form showing up with great clearness against the azure of the Egyptian sky. That was in March, which goes to prove that migratory birds of song have commenced their warblings

before they leave for more northerly climes to breed—their full song I mean—for in this instance the Passera was singing loudly.

The female is altogether of a duller colouring than her mate, being darkish brown with a blue-grey tendency about the wings and tail. It is curious that a bird inhabiting, as a rule, such wild and solitary places should, when caged, become not only tame, but positively bold, and in many cases defiant and pugnacious. My first acquaintance with this charming creature as a cage bird was in one of those picturesque towns that border on the Lake of Como in Northern Italy, that lake which lies embedded amongst mountains like a beautiful sapphire, where everything that meets the eye is picturesque, lovely, and brilliant; where in the spring-time nightingales sing, and peach trees and magnolias open out their delicate pink blossoms in the one case, and their waxen white buds in the other; where church bells clang musically across the water, and pergolas are shadowed over with vines and fig-trees.

There was, and is still for all I know, a certain little shop — a greengrocer's stall — in the principal street of Menaggio, which street runs down hill all the way to the shore of the lake, and this stall was kept by a portly and imperfect ablutioner, commonly called Pietro, a man with a head like a bullet and a neck like a bull, whose eyes were small and bleared; in a word, not in personal appearance at all resembling one's beau ideal of the handsome Italian, with the ready stiletto and the flashing black eyes.

In fact, "a most unattractive old thing!"

But what *did* attract me, was a bird in a picturesque cane-barred cage, which hung from the tumble-down iron balcony, amongst bunches of golden maize, above the stall laden with fruit and vegetables. The bird was singing in spite of its woe-begone appearance, for it was evident that old Pietro considered a bath for his bird as unnecessary as for himself. I asked him to let me see it. What did he call it? "Passera Solitaria, signore. Un uccello magnifico! Canta tutto il giorno, dalla mattina fin alla sera!"

A blue thrush, which under such unwashen circumstances "sang all the day from morning till night," must be a treasure of a bird; so that after a good deal of chattering and haggling, in the midst of which old Pietro shrugged his fat shoulders above his ears, and I turned abruptly away with an imitative shrug, both of us thereby expressing our opinion of the futility of our bargaining, an agreement was arrived at, and the Passera became mine. Oh! the dirt of his cage! no wonder the poor bird's tail was worn to a shred, and his body coated with filth; his feet too, each toe firmly embedded in a hardened lump of dirt and sand, so that each time he hopped from perch to perch there was a sound as of three or four peas rattling about.

It was a real joy, when I had him in my room, to soak those poor neglected feet in a basin of warm water, and to perform the office of a chiropodist. A joy to see those nasty lumps soften and drop off, like great clod-hopping, ill-fitting boots.

And his feathers, after a judicious soaping, sponging, and drying, although for the time being hopelessly shabby, re-appeared with some of their pristine gloss and natural colouring.

That bird plainly showed *his* joy, more especially as he was put into a new and roomy cage, where for the first time in his life he found clean and fresh sand, pure water, and untainted food.

Having proved him to be a desirable bird for a cage, my next aim was to procure a brood of young blue thrushes, and rear them myself from the nest; but for this I had to wait until the following spring, when I hoped to be once more on the shores of the "Lago incantevole." In the meanwhile my Passera successfully endured the dampness, and cold, and fogs of an English winter, very soon becoming friendly and familiar.

Having left Italy in the autumn days when little green figs and large juicy brown ones abounded, when autumn snow had whitened the extreme summits of distant mountains and autumn tints had commenced to reflect themselves in the mirror of water beneath, I returned in April to find the gardens echoing with the songs of newly-arrived nightingales and blackcaps, and gay with the promise of spring. Seeking out a garden-labourer, whose acquaintance I had made during one of my previous visits, and who was a keen observer of birds, I arranged a tramp with him up into the hills behind Cadenabbia, where blue thrushes and rock thrushes (of which more later on) are fairly numerous.

Interludes

Blue Rock Thrush.

pair of grey wagtails amongst some stones in the middle of a stream, on our way up San Martino, and I asked him whether he knew where they built. His answer was that he had found their nest with four young ones, which he had taken home to vary the menu with! Fancy eating grey wagtails! Those graceful, fairy-like little fellows, with their black throats, their sulphur-coloured breasts, and their long slender tails dipping up and down in the familiar wagtail style, enlivening a mountain stream with their quick movements and sprightly call. But what can one expect of people whose parish priests allow and encourage them to bring strings of slaughtered robins and other warblers to their harvest festivals, as contributions to the general offerings? Some birds may be intended as food for mankind, but many would seem to have been created purely for song and ornament, for denizens of our gardens and woods, and for members on earth of a heavenly choir.

Of actually looking into a blue thrush's nest I have not yet had the pleasure, for my "cacciatore" (hunter) came to me one day, to tell me that at a mill-house, by the torrent that runs into the lake from the mountain, I could see a brood of the birds I was wanting, which had just been brought down from the heights above. It seemed a shame to take them away from the enjoyment of their natural surroundings, where, amongst the rocks above the chestnut groves, the large orange lilies and purple columbines brighten the slopes with blooms of topaz and amethyst.

Yet, after a lapse of over nine years, I still have

one of that brood, which, with his gladdening song in every month of the year, gives no one the impression that he is pining either for the Alpine heights in summer or the warm rocks of Egypt in the winter. It was a beautiful brood of five birds about ten days old, their feathers quickly growing, and their eyes becoming rounder. So delighted was I to possess them, that without any bargaining I plumped down a ten-franc piece, accepted by the miller with avidity, and I walked off with my "passere."

Some fresh hay tucked into a covered basket soon made them a cosy nest, whilst some prepared insectiverous food, mixed with some finely chopped raw beef, was carefully made ready to satisfy their hunger. They were not difficult to rear, but of course they required a deal of attention. Early rising was imperative, but who would do anything but rejoice at having an excuse to jump out of bed at four o'clock in the morning of a spring day's dawn at the Como lake? None, unless they were without souls, or inveterate sluggards.

And then, too, when one's bedroom is perched high up in a lovely villa, with a spacious balcony overlooking the garden and the lake, with Bellagio on the opposite shore reflected in the still water as in a mirror, the inducement to leave one's bed, however sleepy one may be, is great. Below, the gardeners are already about, raking over the paths of tiny pebbles, and watering the heliotrope and roses.

The clang of wooden pattens rings along the road, or down the rough path which skirts the garden wall.

)ver the surface of the lake the early bells of the hurches are calling the hour of the first offices of ıe day, mingled with the Gregorian-like tones of easants chanting from some boat which is gliding)wards the shore, leaving in its wake a long silver :reak upon the opaque blueness of the water.

Nightingales, which have been singing almost hrough the night, are now busy at their breakfast; nd you catch sight of a russet tail, as one flits from mongst the oleanders to the group of ilex which onceal the garden entrance from the road.

But it is time to feed the young "passere," for im-atient chirrups are issuing from their basket, and ve hungry orange gaping mouths are opened to heir widest, five long necks upstretched ere ever he lid is lifted. The china dish has been thoroughly leaned and rinsed first of all, for yesterday's food, owever much there may be left, must be dis-ensed with for fear of any smattering of sourness herein.

Though hungry now at this early hour, yet their unger increases and seems to be at its height between ight and nine o'clock.

There is a marked difference in their growth since esterday: less quills, and more feathering. And in nother week they are up on their feet in the hay, oing their best to look out on the world around hem: unmistakable blue thrushes, the males espe-ially being tinted with a warm grey on the general rounding of greyish brown.

A few more days, and my brood begins to hop

out of the basket, when they are transferred to a cage: one of those picturesque cane cages.

It is a pretty sight to see them a little later on, when their tails are an inch long, long enough to be flirted up and down after the manner of the Chat family, flying on to my shoulders and arms when the cage door is opened, where they take up their position with quivering wings and opened beaks, for am I not their father and mother in one? So much so, that if I bring a visitor to my balcony to see them, they will start away timidly, for they know not the voice of strangers. "Birds are such stupid things," so people often say who know nothing whatever about them. Let any one keep a tame blue thrush, and they will soon alter their opinion, for they will discover that he knows his master and members of the household just as well as the most intelligent dog, and perhaps be more faithful; at any rate, my blue thrush will no more think of taking a mealworm (of which he is passionately fond) from a stranger's fingers than he would of barking; whereas he is ready to snatch one from those with which he is familiar, as soon as he sees the box containing them; whilst most dogs can be won through their stomachs!

Like all members of families as they grow up, my young birds have to separate, one going to one friend, another to another; and I still possess a kind and grateful letter from the late Lord Lilford, acknowledging a hen bird which he had hoped to mate with a male already in his possession, but the latter proved to be too much of a tyrant. There is no greater

tyrant than an old male "passera" who has been kept by himself and made a pet of, for he will attack anything that comes within his reach.

When my old friend, whose babyhood at Cadenabbia over nine years ago I have recounted, is let out for a fly in my room, he will make repeated onslaughts upon the butler when he enters, and I have seen the latter unable to advance beyond the door, because the blue thrush, like a flash, is down at his feet, violently attacking each boot as it is moved.

Failing this, he goes for his face, which is pleasant for the butler; it helps him to keep up his dignity, you know! When in his youth (the passera's, not the butler's!) I gave him mealworms, I often said "Pretty boy" in conversing with him—for I do converse a good deal with my birds—and this little term of address the bird picked up, suddenly to my astonishment saying it quite distinctly, so much so that strangers never fail to notice it at once, and on their part to express *their* astonishment. He introduces it into his song, generally at the end of a stanza largely composed of artificial whistlings. His own natural song has a separate place in his repertoire, being uttered more generally when he is alone, and in the spring-time and early summer, rather than in the other months of the year; but his artificial song comes in at all seasons, whether he is moulting or not.

With birds that have a real affection for any one to whom they belong, there is no doubt that yearnings for what people call their freedom are not existent.

It is often said, "I don't keep birds, for I think

it is cruel to cage them." Would this still be said if people could see my blue thrush when he is let out of his cage with the window wide open, and he sitting on the sill thereof, only to scuttle back to his cage, as a wild passera would to his cleft in the rocks, when a stranger appears on the scene. I am sure that tame birds like that look upon their cages just as we do our houses, and feel with regard to them that there is no place like home.

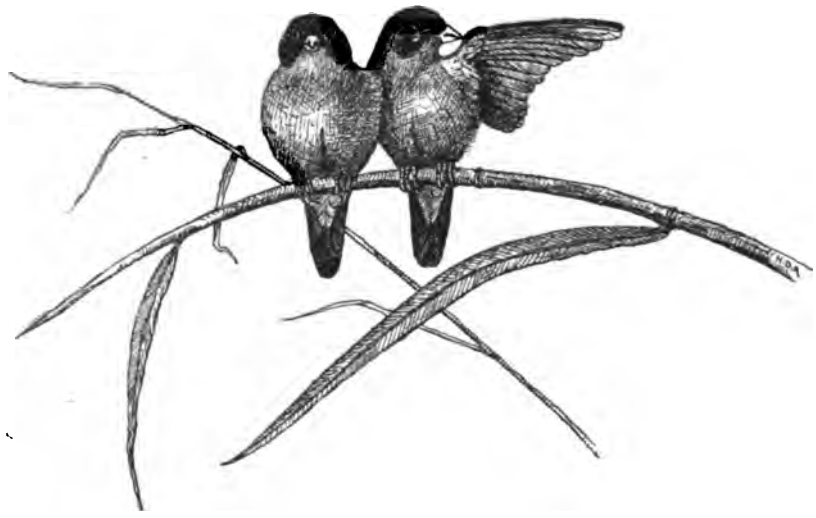
In the entrance hall in summer time he used to fly about, sitting in the open doorway, singing on the steps, but quickly darting indoors again if any one approached either from the house or to it. One day, it is true, he did fly out of one of the windows, but so certain was every one familiar with him that he would come back, that when I asked his friend the butler where he had gone to, I only received a quiet and unalarmed answer, "He is somewhere in the garden."

On my going out to whistle for him, accompanied by two lady guests, he at once answered me from the top of a garden wall, where he was running up and down, piping all the time with his feathers puffed out, evidently enjoying the escapade.

Walking towards him, he took flight on to the stone string course of the house, on a level with the bedroom windows; and seemed decidedly disinclined to come to me, singing in a defiant way at me. Then I suggested to my guests that they were perhaps *de trop* as far as he was concerned; impressing on them the fact that of course it did not apply in my *own* case!

Barely had the last inch of their skirts disappeared round the corner of the house, before that wise bird was at my feet, and as I walked round to the front door, he flitted after me, and hopped into his cage when I held it to him, turning fiercely round to peck my fingers as I shut his door.

Poor "Pretty Boy"! It is sad to think that he is growing old; and that at the age of nine years and a half he has, I fear, not many more left him in which to enjoy his happy life, a life which in its own brightness has brightened many an hour for those who know him, his song serving to bring back happy days spent in homes of bygone days, where my passera was always a special household god.



ORANGE-CHEEKED WAXBILLS

CHAPTER IV

ROCK THRUSHES

"The bird will love you if you treat it kindly; is as frank and friendly as bird can be."

MY Rock Thrush is worthy of a separate chapter, though one perhaps necessarily curtailed in length, owing to the fact that so much that describes his wild life and his residences is identical with that of the blue thrush, his cousin. You know one of our most beautiful migratory birds, the redstart, don't you? That bright little fellow that arrives from Africa in April, with his sweet though not prominent song, his quivering rufous tail, his black throat, and his snowy white forehead. Well! the rock thrush is in his manners and movements uncommonly like a big redstart; that is to say, whilst

latter is the size of a robin, the former about ls that of a starling. Picture him in his summer ıage; his whole head of a pale cobalt blue, that ır extending to the throat and back of the neck, re in front it is sharply met by the breast colour, whole of which, with the underparts, is a bright ıwish chestnut; whilst on the back there is deep rnish grey extending to the wings, where the rn becomes purer. The tail is truly "redstartian," in colour and movement; and the conspicuous e spot of the redstart's forehead appears in the lle of the rock thrush's back, just where the wings : together : a white spot, the size of a two-shilling e. And this white patch serves, as with many r birds of conspicuous plumage, to break up the ırs; and is especially serviceable to a bird like the thrush, dwelling constantly on stony ground; for n the bird's back is towards one, the white, ɔunded by rufous and brown, looks exactly like a e of the same colour, or like a bright light upon point or angle of a rock.

The way in which most brilliant coloured birds nilate with their surroundings is a very wonderful striking provision of Nature's Creator.

Now let us, without I hope running the risk of tition of parts of the preceding chapter, visit her mountain of Italy: that beautiful one over-ging the Lugano lake, close to whose shores you ascend it. First of all through ravines which shadow villages, where steep paths and cobble-e by-ways lead you to higher ground until you

presently reach the groves of chestnut, to which you are grateful for shade and coolness ; but which must be left behind before you reach the summit of Monte Generoso, clothed in brushwood and trees of more stunted growth. But here amongst the ravines, where great boulders have tumbled down, and are heaped in artistic tumult one on the other, where troops of crimson pœonies bedeck the steeps of rock, tiny streams gushing amongst them on their way to the lake below, is a summer home of the rock thrushes, which live, as a rule, at a somewhat lower level in the mountains to that of the blue thrush. You may catch an echo of his song, a song not so far-reaching perhaps as that of his blue cousin ; but melodious and wild, entirely fitted to his surroundings, as is always the case in Nature's economy. Flitting from stone to stone (the Germans call it the *steinmerle*), his white-patched back showing conspicuously as he flies, you will see him until he settles ; when he suddenly vanishes, environed by rust-stained rocks with dark shadows and whitened lights, to which his plumage bears so strong a resemblance when at liberty amongst them.

His mate is still more difficult to distinguish, for her feathers, except for the rufous tail, are for the most part of an unconspicuous speckled brown, lacking the blue head, the chestnut breast, and the white back of the male. Here again Nature's Creator has decreed things well in His eternal wisdom, for if the brilliancy of male birds in many species was shared by the female alike, how could she conceal herself and her eggs from view ?

What can be more glowing than the plumage of a male gold pheasant, yet what more closely resembles the fallen leaves or the ground than that of his mate; the lovely barred brown of whose feathers entirely helps to conceal her, as she sits closely on her nest in some fern-covered hollow, on which the sun glints with beams of light, broken on the earth beneath by shadows of overhanging fronds and leaves and branches, so that the pheasant's dark and lighter russet bars exactly imitate her surroundings. Had she a flowing crest of golden floss silk, and a vivid breast of scarlet like her husband, how quickly she would be detected; she, and her brood when it is hatched out; but those tiny bodies of golden brown, relieved and varied by longitudinal stripes of buff, assimilate themselves in a perfect way with the undergrowth amongst which they move.

It is just the same with all the Phasianidæ, peafowl included, except, perhaps, in the case of the Javanese peahen, who is bold enough to wear a dress of rich green like the male; yet even she must dispense with his court train. No doubt in her native wilds she lays her eggs under recesses of green foliage, as rich in colour as her own feathers, thus escaping detection.

The duck family also is an example of Nature's wisdom. Many male birds, such as mandarins, summer duck, and different kinds of teal, are quite bejewelled with brilliant colouring; yet almost invariably their wives are clothed in browns and greys of sober and unassuming tints. A mallard, our jolly sporting old English "wild duck," is as bright as you

can want him, his green head glistening in the March sunshine against his maroon breast and his pearly grey back; but go and search over there amongst the rushes and the osiers, staring hard perhaps at his duck on her downy nest, her head twisted round to assist the deception of turning herself into a small heap of dead leaves; and *I* may lay *odds* that you don't detect where *she* lays *eggs*, unless your eye is in practice, and your perception keen for things in bird life.

And so the rock thrush mothers her pale blue eggs, concealed upon her nest in some rocky bank, where the Alpine rhododendron, showered over with carmine flower heads, makes rosy blushes on the mountain's face; her mate meanwhile, rising on quivering wings to utter a song of impetuous warbling, falls back with outspread wings to perch on the great lichen-covered boulder that overshadows her.

The high ground of France, in Auvergne, for instance, is also a summer resort of this lovely bird.

A road that winds up and away from the picturesque town of Mont Dore, where asthmatical invalids collect for drinking the waters and taking the baths, leads you through pine forests which ascend steeply on the one side to be lost sight of in the heights above, whilst on the other they clothe the precipices which fall abruptly from your very feet, and finally brings you to the summit of those hills, from whence a panorama of what seems the whole of France stretches for leagues below you, a plain from which, in the immediate foreground, gigantic castles of natural rock separated by deep gullies from the main body of mountains, rise in

splendid dignity, warmly clothed in firs and undershrub. Behind you the trees are there no longer; but instead, the upland meadows decked with flowers stretch away to the top, here and there scattered with great rocks, as if thrown by some giant hand in boyish play. It is July, the air fresh and life-giving, the white clouds sailing high against an azure sky. Some little brown pipits are flitting close at hand, and some wheatears are bobbing about on some stones not far off, but higher up amongst those scattered boulders are some larger birds, at least a dozen and a half, which are running over the stones, chasing each other, and singing.

It is a colony of rock thrushes, for I can certainly see three males in adult plumage as well as females; whilst here, there, and apparently everywhere in that particular spot are the young broods, fully fledged. The nesting season is pretty well over, and the old birds do not mind showing themselves; indeed, as I walk slowly up the grassy slopes, trying to seem as if I didn't know that there was such a bird as a rock thrush, they allow me to come quite close, and one fine old male bird is puffing himself out with his head feathers compressed, tilting at another, as he runs with halting steps upon a flat stone of gigantic proportions.

My wife, who is with me, is enchanted at the sight. When one knows any particular bird or animal personally and intimately, one is always much more interested in the particular species to which it belongs; and now, after several years of close friendship with my tame rock thrush, she is keenly delighted at seeing

him, as it were, in his wild state for the first time, behaving, too, exactly as he behaves in a drawing-room when he is out of his cage, so that we both began to think he must have followed us to the Auvergne hills, and be there amongst that pleasant company.

And I whistle, as I always whistle to him, which causes the beautiful male bird that we were especially attracted towards, to puff himself out defiantly and whistle in response.

But discretion to him is the better part of valour, for as we are emboldened to a nearer approach, he gracefully retires, not hurriedly like a clamorous blackbird, but flitting up the slope from rock to rock, finally disappearing, with his companions and his family, to more solitary quarters.

We hear him piping a little distance off, as much as to say, "You needn't think a Frenchman is frightened of you English; those rocks are not Fashoda, they are mine, and I shall return to take possession as soon as you are gone." It was refreshing to find these pretty mountain birds so unmolested, to know that although they had chosen France as their summer home, they were scarcely noticed by the inhabitants; actually not shot and eaten.

"Le merle de roche" they are called, I think; and the Italians style them "Codirossone"; or perhaps more usually, at any rate in peasant lingo, "Colossera."

Another day we rode off into the heart of the mountains, behind the snow-capped peak that towers up above Mont Dore, accompanied by a chasseur,

who said he could guide us to another haunt of the rock thrush. It was a sultry day, hung about with ominous thunder-clouds, which threatened, before our picnic lunch, to overwhelm us, for the thunder was rolling and grumbling in the distance, and the lightning flashing every now and then. Seated amongst masses of sweet bog myrtle, we eat our sandwiches, which we washed down with water from a little rill at our feet ; and continuing our ride, reached the edge of the plateau, where a steep and stony path gave us a descent to some peasants' cottages, built amongst the rocks on the sloping mountainous ground below. A few pipits and some wheatears seemed to make up the bird life ; but as yet, no rock thrushes. At last, all that strongly attracted our attention was the rain, which burst upon us in torrents, causing us to seek for shelter, almost drenched to the skin, in a long wooden cottage, where the kindly peasants welcomed us in, whilst our chasseur took our horses to a dark and dirty cow-shed.

Up some slippery steps we clambered, to find ourselves in the one room of this dwelling, which was evidently kitchen, parlour, and bedroom.

The beds were in the form of wooden berths, constructed along one wall in a row of two tiers, with little curtains to draw across the front of each.

Within the cribs small and cheap crucifixes hung, and tawdry pictures of our Lady, bedecked with artificial flowers, except in one instance, where a little girl's devotion—so her mother told us—had moved her to buy a small carved bracket, on which a blue

vase stood, filled with real mountain blossoms and leaves, and constantly replenished.

The mother had a sweet face, surrounded by the goffered edging of her white cap ; and the shrivelled "Gran' mère," was a member of the family.

Their French was not exactly Parisian, indeed it was such a mountain patois that we had a certain difficulty in understanding it.

Our French, which hitherto we had thought decidedly indifferent, shone out with a lustre we had never hoped for, when the mother of the home asked us what part of France we came from. Was it Paris? "Oh no," we answered, "we are English, not French." "*English?*" was the astonished reply, "we thought you were French." Then a moment's pause, and a polite stare indicative of much curiosity, followed by the announcement, "We have never seen any English before." And there were further glances of deep curiosity, with a tone in the voice which seemed to say, "That accounts for the milk in the cocoa-nut ; who but the mad English lady and gentleman would be riding over the Auvergne mountains in a drenching thunderstorm?"

It is true we seemed to be taking our pleasures sadly that day, as we sat there with the rain-water trickling down our clothes into puddles on the floor. But we wouldn't have missed this enforced visit for anything, for this insight of French peasant life was interesting, and we learnt afresh that "kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood." "Wouldn't madame and monsieur have some-

thing to eat?" as the best bread cake was brought to the fore, hungrily eyed by the children. "Madame must have her cloak dried, Madame is so wet." "Madame and Monsieur must not think of leaving until the storm is over," &c., &c.

Then I asked them whether their church was far off. "Yes, a long way," was the answer.

Does the curé come to visit them? "Oh yes, from time to time."

And then our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the father of the family; absolutely drenched, poor man, to the skin. This was embarrassing; since, seeing we were in his bedroom, he must either doff his wet clothes there, or nowhere; and doff them he did, after duly saluting *les étrangers;* stripping himself bare from his waist upwards, whilst his wife found him a dry shirt in the depths of a large drawer beneath his berth in the wall.

We thought it advisable to be blind to the rest of his toilette; and as the rain still descended in buckets outside, turned our backs to our host, as far as we were able, to take a deep interest in the misty view through the open doorway. When we ventured to look round once more, he was clothed again; and I plied him with questions about the rock thrushes. Oh yes, he knew them; he had known of two or three nests a month or so ago, but it was too late now to get young birds, and this was disappointing; so the storm having cleared off, we wended our homeward way, with many thanks to our kindly peasants, and a *pour-boire* with which they seemed pleased.

Some day, when my poor old rock thrush—about as old and as faithful as my Passera—has winged his flight to a better land, I shall perhaps return to Auvergne, in the merry month of May, to seek his successor. At any rate, I know where to find one. My old fellow—for nine years is fairly old for a cage bird of that species; it is certainly very middle-aged—was reared by myself in the same way, and under very much the same circumstances, as the blue thrush. He was one of a brood of four, all of which were unable to feed themselves when I brought them home from Italy, and this meant feeding them at least every two hours of the journey: an awkward thing to do if the carriages of the train are full, and fellow-travellers unappreciative. Yet the latter is not often the case; but, on the contrary, it is seldom or ever that I have found them anything but keenly interested in seeing my birds, which emboldens me to take them out one by one to make sure that they receive plenty under rather trying circumstances.

And so each of my young rock thrushes were brought out, opening their bright orange mouths for a piece of raw meat [as in turns I held them in my left hand], as readily as they would have had the raw meat been a fat grub, my hand their nest on the slopes of Monte Crocione, above Lecco, and I their very own father.

At Basle and Calais, if there was time, my first action after a necessary inspection of luggage was to ask for some *bœuf crude* at the buffet, *pour des oiseaux*, and then to beg a porter to find me a

handful of fresh hay for the bottom of the cage, so that my thrushes should not arrive in England with soiled and dirty plumage, besides the fact that it helped to keep the cage *soigné* and sweet. There was no water vessel, because the water is sure to get spilt and mess everything to no purpose ; so my way of quenching the little chaps' thirst, was to dip my finger in a glass of water, letting two or three drops fall down their open throats after their hunger was satisfied.

People often wondered how my birds looked so fresh and clean and healthy, but they would have wondered still more had they realised the hundred and one little ways with which I obtained so satisfactory a result. Four birds in so confined a space very soon become dirty, the wings and tail soiled, the feathers broken, and the feet clogged. To combat these eye-sores, one must, on a journey, sponge the soiled feathers and feet, and if some of the food has dried round the edges of the mouth it can be washed off carefully with a wetted finger, to the improvement of the bird's appearance, and its manifest comfort.

We all know the joy of sponging one's face when the dust and cinders of the train have choked up the pores of the skin.

With insectivorous food given in a moistened and pasty form it is very difficult to feed young birds for long without some accumulation of it outside their mouths, for as they swallow it voraciously down, particles are almost bound to break off, and be worked to either side of the bird's mouth.

And all this fussy care on my part is not without

its reward. My rock thrushes were safely landed in England; all but one, as in the case of the blue thrushes, being given away to friends.

There is a photograph of the late Lord Lilford, with a rock thrush in a cage on the table by which he is sitting, which was one of his favourite birds, and I *believe* is the "Colossera" that I gave him, picked from the brood, reared up, and brought home in the manner just described.

How much we bird-lovers wish he was still amongst us!

The male bird that I kept—and still have—did not acquire a perfectly bright breeding plumage until his third spring, inclusive of the spring in which he was hatched; but then his blue head, chestnut breast, and white back, with deep brown shoulders, appeared in all their beauty. He is an early moulter, all his feathers, except the tail and larger wing feathers, which are only cast in the autumnal moult, falling out in positive showers by the middle of February, when his speckled winter plumage, which he has worn since the previous August, is quickly replaced by the more gay and conspicuous costume of the breeding season. It is as the summer costume of a fine Ascot, compared with the more sombre ones of a foggy winter in London.

And how my old rock thrush sings after his return from Nature's dressmaker! Like the Passera, already written about in the previous chapter, he has picked up some of my impromptu whistlings, but his wild love song of the mountains is reserved for special

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occasions only, and only for his master. Then he stretches up his head, compressing the feathers of it until it looks almost snake-like, droops his wings as he tightens down his body, and spreads his redstart tail into a quivering chestnut fan. Low warblings, far down in the throat, commence; piano—piano; the notes trembling in time with his body, and gradually coming to crescendo, to die back again into a far distant tone.

He jumps off his perch on to the sand, the music poured forth passionately all the time, as he runs quickly up and down, his throat uplifted, and his fan tail tremulous with the strength of his song—a song that sounds like rippling water.

No doubt it is the manner in which he serenades and courts his fiancée—his *promessa sposa*—as he trips round her, amongst the gentians and the *roses des alpes* of his summer haunts.

Five minutes afterwards he will be himself again, so to speak: puffing out those tightened feathers; back again from his dreamt-of wife; and whistling some artificial stanza that he has picked up from me.

It was at the finale of one of these ecstatic love songs that he escaped through the window into the garden of the little Suffolk rectory that was then our home—his and mine. I opened his cage-door as he was singing—for he constantly comes out for a fly in the room—but he seemed for once to lose his head.

Suddenly, without a moment's warning, even as his rapid warblings were still uttered, he darted like

lightning across the room, and through the latticed casement.

It wasn't fright that moved him to it, it was apparently a sudden wild impulse, begotten of instincts hitherto unrealised.

I began to be nervous ! Nowhere could the bird be seen. No answer came to my whistlings !

At last, across the meadow that was separated from my garden by a moat—a pretty water-meadow bordered by giant poplars, and at the far side by a clear river—I saw a bird flitting from tree to tree, with a flight that was familiar, but not that of any of our British birds. Arming myself with a tin of mealworms, I set off to capture the truant. He was at the very tip-top of a very high poplar, the sun shining conspicuously on his orange breast ; and when he heard me whistle, his melodious answer in the stillness of a cloudless May day came back at once. In spite of his independent position, I could tell by the cock of his head and the tone of his voice, that he felt rather like a lost child. Again I whistled ; swoop ! down he came towards me ; but taking fright in mid-air, inclined upwards again, to settle on another tree the other side of the meadow, and off I went once more, apprehensive that he might get altogether beyond my bearings and his own also.

But again his whistle came clear and strong. Then he caught sight of his mealworm box.

There was no missing his mark this time ; he shot into the air off his tree top, to drop like an arrow at my very feet, running round them with his body

feathers uplifted, and warbling in a crooning confidential way, which said, "It was very nice, my bird's-eye view from the poplar tops, but I prefer you and the mealworms, after all." After that, I had only to place my hand on him and carry him home; he pecking at my fingers and piping all the time, which makes one somehow think of "Peter Piper pecked a peck of pepper." There were some boys standing by the river fishing; wondering why I was meandering in the meadows, gazing up at the trees, and whistling in a manner that at first must have seemed to qualify me for an immediate entrance to the nearest lunatic asylum. The sequel astonished them considerably!

Birds, apparently wild, don't usually whistle back to one in precisely the same key and notes as yourself, or settle themselves at your feet to let you pick them up!

How vividly it is all impressed on my memory! The stretch of water-meadows, gay with cuckoo plant and lingering king-cups; the glimpse of the mill through the tree trunks across the river by the back-water; the train puffing along in the distance between Melton and Wickham Market; the pretty thatched roof of the rectory, half hidden from the meadows by a giant copper-beech; the distempered walls of apricot-orange, with the green wood shutters thrown back from the latticed casements, over which climbed roses—William Allen Richardson, Fortune's yellow, and a crimson rambler—besides honeysuckles and jessamine; the garden aflame with huge scarlet poppies and many

columbines; the stately flint tower of the old church, rising amongst the trees in the background.

And amidst all that, as well as, oh! so *much* more, I can still hear the piping of my rock thrush, bringing back to me as he sings the memories of one of the brightest, happiest little homes that even England could ever rejoice in.

LONG-TAILED FINCHES (AUSTRALIA)

CHAPTER V

NIGHTINGALES

"Without further preamble, I will ask you to look to-day, more carefully than usual, at your well-known favourite, and to think about him with some precision."

THE very name of the nightingale brings to one's mind the sweet visions of spring, when the earth is awakening from her sleep, quivering into newness of life in the lengthening days of warmer sunshine, when oak and hazel-copses are carpeted with stretches of purple blue-bells, white anemones, and, in some of the more favoured spots, yellow daffodils. Here, where the primroses have all but given place to their other sisters of the woods and meadows, for their fragrant blossoms are fading out of sight, the summer migrants have again

returned, to brighten the whole country with their songs.

Before the March days are done, the little restless chiff-chaff may be heard, calling incessantly as he flits from branch to branch; always perky, and nothing daunted by chilly winds or leafless trees. He is one of the first to lead the way in that countless throng of fluttering wings, which have commenced their long and wonderful journeys from far-off lands of perpetual sunshine. Only a day or two ago and that tiny chiff-chaff, who is making himself at home in the garden shrubberies or the woods by the river, was in Africa.

Yet he has taken his flight, filled with the strength of that unerring instinct of the wonderful things of God's nature, flitting—flitting—flitting—a small fairy-like body; passing in his course continents and islands, ocean waves and rivers, until—"Chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff"—he is back in the old gardens of England, to swell the melodious song of spring. Then more put in an appearance: redstarts, garden-warblers, blackcaps, with their bright cheery song, wood-warblers, and others.

Then come the warm April showers, when every green and vinous bud is glistening with the diamonds of the sky, and cowslips are sprinkled through the fields and meadows, when rain-storms and bright sunshine succeed each other, and massive glistening clouds float like majestic icebergs under the blue of the heavens.

Hark! amidst the chorus of songsters, the fluting

of blackbirds, the piping of thrushes, the warbling of a hundred others, suddenly, as a Diva's voice above that of some great human choir, ring out the long-drawn notes of the nightingale, followed by a succession of trills and warbles, which perhaps only Jenny Lind ever really represented in the human voice. There is a peculiar strength of quality in a nightingale's voice, which, even when he is singing in the midst of a full chorus of other birds, shines out and is separated from among them, forcibly catching the ear of the listener. Other voices, such as the blackbirds, may be, in a sense, richer in quality, even as a contralto or mezzo-soprano may have at times a richer sound than a soprano; but no bird can equal the nightingale in that wonderful gush of quickly-changing notes and stanzas, poured forth with such ease and strength — strength more wonderful considering the small body from which it issues.

And this bird Diva — if one may, with poets, endow him with a feminine title—[the hen bird does not sing]—what is his outward appearance?

Certainly extremely unlike the Divas of human society, gorgeous in Parisian silks and satins.

What is he like, this sweet singing bird whose notes are ringing out from among the thorn trees?

The very fact that he is hidden under showers of blossoming May rather enhances the beauty of his song than otherwise, lending a spirit of mystery to his presence.

Now he has paused at the end of a trill, and a small gracefully-made bird flits to the ground amongst

the bouquets of wild flowers which Nature has lavishingly scattered at his feet.

He is only clothed in a rich but sober dress of brown, which warms into a brighter chestnut hue in the tail and upper coverts, and pales into lighter shades upon the breast.

There, amongst the blue-bells, he hops on slender legs and feet, his bright brown eye searching for some insect. In size no larger than a robin, or not much so; but in shape there is more *finesse*, and his movements are more lithe.

As he flies off to some sheltering undergrowth, his rufous tail shows almost as conspicuously as a redstart's, and on settling he moves it up and down, uttering his call note—"We-pr-r-r, we-pr-r-r."

I think it is a mistake to consider the nightingale's song in any sense as a melancholy one; it rather seems to be an overflowing rush of gladness and joy.

It sounds as if he was so delighted to have reached the sweet English woods, and gardens, and meadows once more in safety, where he is, during the first few days of his arrival, awaiting the return of his little brown wife, when he will upraise his voice from early morn till dewy eve, and all through the moon-lit nights will challenge the bird world to equal him.

In May, craftily concealed in some hazel stump or tangle of undergrowth, the nest of dead leaves and fibres of roots will be built, wherein, mothering four or five olive-brown eggs, his mate will sit, her brown plumage exactly assimilating with her

surroundings. You may unknowingly disturb her from it and leave it undiscovered, for she has flitted noiselessly away, leaving her presence undetected.

Nervous of the intruding giant she may be, but she is too ladylike to upraise her voice in clamorous protest; and silently, amongst the depths of the growth of scrubs, awaits his departure before she slips back again.

Yet with all this timidity and caution, nightingales are unexpectedly bold; taking up their abode in suburban gardens, and building their nests in close proximity to houses.

In the pretty little Suffolk garden of the rectory I once lived in I have found at least three nightingales' nests; one, I remember, being only a few yards from the front door, and close to the gravel drive that leads to it.

The cock bird used to sit (and may still, for aught I know) on a branch of a Scotch fir which grew on the little lawn close to my bedroom windows; and many a night in May have I lain in bed with the casements thrown wide open, the moonlight pouring in, and the song of the nightingale ringing in my ears.

"I cannot guess what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
. . . . . .

Darkling I listen ; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath ;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou are pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

. . . . . .

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down ;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and by clown :
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

If I was kept awake, it was well worth it, and I often rose from my bed before finally falling to sleep to enjoy that beautiful song for a little while longer, as I stood at the window and looked beyond the garden boundary across the water-meadows, from which the notes of rival nightingales came floating towards me, varied by an occasional outburst of chatter from some cheeky little sedge warbler amongst the rushes by the river, or even the mellow tones of a cuckoo. And in the early morning as the dawn began to break, the nightingale, having rested for an hour or so, had recommenced his song, which in spite of a united and increasing chorus of other birds, still rang clearly out.

[illegible]

. . . . . .

[illegible]

If I was kept awake, [illegible] I often rose [illegible] sleep to enjoy that beautiful [illegible] longer, as I stood at the [illegible] the garden boundary across [illegible] which the notes of rival [illegible] towards me, varied by an occasional [illegible] from some cheeky little [illegible] rushes by the river, or even the [illegible] cuckoo. And in the early morning, [illegible] to break, the nightingale, having [illegible] or so, had commenced his song, [illegible] united and increasing chorus of other [illegible] clearly out.

The Nightingale.

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Under such conditions, the dawn of a May morning in England is one of the most beautiful things that the Creator has granted to us.

For an hour or more every feathered throat is quivering with this wonderful outburst of song, and never a discordant note is heard, although each bird is going his own way with varied tones, and stanzas, and keys; so marvellously is nature ordered and arranged.

Set a human company of picked singers to sing their favourite songs together, each one choosing his own melody, and time, and key! The result would be appalling! in the same way that mixtures of certain colours, which in nature, either in flowers or birds, are beautiful, in human dress (at any rate in European dress) would be eccentric and hideous.

I could not resist keeping a watch on one of the nightingale's nests in my Suffolk garden, which was built in the base of a large sheaf of reeds, placed in an upright position by myself amongst some snow-berry bushes and lilacs, at the back of an herbaceous border, for some of my fancy ducks to nest under.

The bushes grew at the top and down the sides of a bank overhanging a moat; and the spot, although so close to a gravel walk, was very snug, and sheltered by a thick hedge of thorn. It was in visiting my reed-sheaves to see whether my mandarin or summer ducks had taken advantage of them, that I discovered the nightingale on her nest. She had selected a small hollow in the side of the sheaf, about a foot from the ground, in which she had constructed her leafy nest, using very little material at the back, where the reeds

themselves acted as a buttress, whilst in the front it was built out, until there was quite a solid collection of withered leaves hanging down, and at first sight appearing to have been merely blown there by a winter gale. Within this cunningly-constructed negligence was the neatest of cups, containing four olive-brown eggs, on which the pretty little brown bird sat. So beautifully was she hidden, owing to her colouring and the deceiving appearance of the nest, that I had put my hand close to her in order to look under the reed-sheaf before I discovered her ; and then I only did so on account of her flitting away under my very nose.

After that, with great caution, I used to step through the plants of giant poppies (Bracteatum) which grew in the border between me and the nest, and without appearing to notice her, take sly peeps. And she, sweet little bird, used to sit tight, her bright eye shining just over the edge of the nest's cup, her russet tail pressed against the wall of reed behind her.

Whenever I did this, the male bird would at once make himself heard in the bushes near by, with his "Wee ! pr-r-r—Wee ! pr-r-r" of alarm and warning. I cannot help thinking that she must have said, "Plague take the man, I wish he'd keep quiet, and then I shouldn't be discovered." Birds often betray the whereabouts of their nests by the clamour they make, and the distress of mind they display.

When the young ones were hatched and had begun to feather, I took two out of the four to rear up by hand, not being willing to deprive the poor birds of all their offspring ; but hand-reared nightingales are

seldom or ever as robust as "branchers," that is to say, as young birds of the year, caught after they have flown, and before they migrate to their winter quarters. I managed, however, to rear my two little fellows on fresh raw beef, chopped extremely small, mixed with fresh yolk of eggs—hard-boiled—and preserved ants' eggs (or rather cocoons), which had been first of all soaked. Some grated sponge cake would have been a beneficial ingredient to this receipt. Such a mixture is a good one for a full-grown nightingale in a cage, with the addition of four or five mealworms a day, and an occasional spider, ear-wig, &c., when in season.

One of my young birds collapsed in his autumn moult; the other lived through the winter, but never sang. It may have been a hen. At any rate, I shall conclude it was. So tame was she, that when the spring came I allowed her to fly out of her cage into the garden, where she would follow me about when I was tending my borders, appearing unexpectedly from beneath a group of delphinium, whose azure heads of flower were erected above pink, and white, and crimson Shirley poppies, to the height of eight and nine feet. In the little parlour—whose latticed window on one side opened into the verandah—when I was sitting at breakfast, I often heard a slight frou-frou of small wings, and there on the table amongst white cups and saucers, and bunches of sweet peas in vases of green glass, was my nightingale; head on one side, rufous tail moved up and down, and brown eyes with anxious expression. "Please, I want a mealworm," she said, quite plainly, by movement of tail and expression of eye.

So the box was fetched, and her breakfast was served, all alive o' ; *so* good, and much the same to birds, I should think, as oysters are to human beings, to those at least who like them. People shudder when they see my tin of wriggling mealworms, but they're much cleaner feeders than oysters, and they don't jump about more than frogs or shrimps and the like, all of which are very good to eat.

"Yes, but then we don't eat them alive! *Ugh!*" Yes, dear lady, we do ; that is to say, in the case of oysters, at any rate.

Whether little Miss Nightingale—I have to call her "little" to distinguish her from the great one—whether she managed to migrate or not, I cannot say ; anyhow she disappeared some time in August, and I saw her no more.

While she lasted, she was like a newly-blown Gloire de Dijon—very sweet and very charming ; but, like the Gloire, she was but for a time, and then she faded out of sight.

It used to astonish men and women to see me followed by my nightingale, along walks that were bordered by the jewels of flowerland, where in due succession there marched in pure array a glorious company : a company which often to me seemed to foreshadow and typify a greater and a still more glorious one, when human souls and bodies, redeemed from sin, will be gathered together, shining forth in varied grace, yet each one so beautiful in its own fashion, arising to newness of eternal life. In such wise can one "consider the lilies of the field."

In such wise, too, are the flowers of a garden an enhanced joy when one appreciates the living truth, that whilst we are planting and watering, God is giving the increase.

So I look back along that array of hyacinths, and daffodils, and little blue scillas, which were succeeded —and so gradually, too, that the pain of parting was much softened—by columbines, blue and white, yellow and scarlet, palest mauve and deepest purple; gorgeous giant poppies and gay little Icelanders; blue delphiniums of every shade, with white lilies of the Madonna, and orange ones from the Italian hillsides; and ever so many more, about which Dean Hole and Mrs. Earle and Mr. Robinson can tell you.

Back they came every year with freshened strength and beauty, to help the spring, and summer, and autumn, and even winter to be just one bit more beautiful; back again to greet the sun with their varied colours and forms; back again to say, "How are you?" like human friends; like them, too, to linger for a while, and bid good-bye with *au revoir*, for "good-bye," even with friends whose bodies, like the flowers, are laid beneath the turf, has always *au revoir*.

Is it so with the little nightingale, whose lithe brown body I still in memory see, as amid that array of flowers she came flitting and hopping after me along the gravel paths?

It is very curious that nightingales should restrict themselves to certain counties, never being seen or heard in some that would seem to be just as well suited to them as those that they select.

For instance, one would have thought that Devonshire and Cornwall, with their wooded glens and streams, would have attracted these birds, and also Wales and parts of Yorkshire; but in such districts of England they are extremely local or scarce, whereas in Suffolk they are abundant, sitting boldly on the almost bare branches of the roadside hedges in the middle of April, and singing loudly. Hampshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, and Kent are their favourite counties, where they are found in abundance, and are perhaps (at least one hopes so) on the increase.

It is miserably cruel to imprison newly-arrived nightingales, a large percentage of which succumb; but, thanks to the increasing love for wild birds in England, with their consequent special protection under the Wild Birds' Protection Act, it is probable that the Whitechapel bird-trappers do not get so many opportunities of catching the poor nightingales as they formerly had.

They have worked enough wanton mischief and destruction amongst the goldfinches, birds which do incalculable good to farming by feeding so very much upon thistle seeds.

As to what harm various species of birds do to gardens and agricultural land, there is undoubtedly much exaggeration and ignorance. People see what they think is harm done, whilst they fail to observe the benefit that is wrought. They are very indignant at the loss of their fruit. The blackbirds and thrushes have taken their strawberries and currants; the bull-

finches have robbed them of their gooseberries; the titmice have spoilt their pears, &c., &c.

But how about the thousands of destructive insects that all these birds eat? Neither titmice, or blackbirds, or thrushes feed their young on strawberries and pears, &c., but on insects of all sorts, hundreds of which are taken from the midst of the fruit garden all through the spring and summer days.

Personally I willingly surrender to these birds their share of fruit; nor do I blame them or feel vindictive towards them for the tithe they exact in return for their sweet songs, their interesting habits, and the unseen and unknown benefits that they, in the economy of nature, shower upon us.

Shoot down the birds and wait for the result! There will be an enormous increase of insects and noxious grubs; devouring the roots, the leaves, and the fruit of our plants, our vegetables, and our trees. The work of the birds, as a rule, resembles that of everything else: the best is that which is unseen and often unknown.

To sparrows I do not refer. Black sheep they probably are; but every family has a member of that colour, so they say!

Putting all that aside, the mere capture of our wild birds, in the breeding season especially, has reduced their numbers considerably, and those rascals who, armed with a gun, in the hopes of being mistaken for "sportsmen," cruelly and wantonly shoot down the sea-birds as soon as ever the law of the land permits them to do so, ought to be shot themselves.

Accounts that have been from time to time published of the reckless slaughter of kittiwake gulls at Lundy Island, and other spots about our coasts, make one blush for one's countrymen.

But the law, aided by such books as those published by Mr. Kearton and his brother, as well as by other enthusiastic ornithologists, will no doubt gradually bring about a reaction in favour of the birds.

In lamenting the capture of wild nightingales upon their return to their summer quarters, I have wandered in my thoughts in defence of other species.

I remember taking the liberty to respond to an invitation to address the members of a Ladies' Club, which had its headquarters in Oxford Street.

And I chose "Birds," with their approval, as my subject. Those poor ladies! I believe I talked for an hour, in the course of which I suppose I showed my great love for birds in particular, and for the study of ornithology in general; mentioning the fact that I kept pet birds in cages, and relating anecdotes about them.

When I had finished speaking, members of the Club were invited by the Chairman—a lady physician—to say anything they thought fit upon the subject of the evening. I must add that in the course of my address I had, in a very plain manner, given to the Creator of all good things the glory due to Him for the beauty and wonder of design in the plumage of birds.

I think it was this touch that pinched the shoe

of a certain German lady in the audience; for hardly had the fair Chairman reseated herself, when immediately opposite me there jumped to her feet a female who was positively alarming in the way in which she screamed at me with strident German tones, in broken English, glaring at me through a most formidable pair of *pince-nez*, the state of her biscuit-coloured hair giving one the idea that she had quite lately been dragged through a hedge backwards!

"I should like to ask ze lectur-r-*er*, whezzer he tink it is not vary *cr-ruel* to keep ze bir-rds in ze cages. Ze lectur-r-er say he lofes ze bir-rds, and he makes zem pr-r-isoners. It does seem as if he say one ting, and do anozzer!

"And ze lectu-r-rer did say, dat ze Cr-reator has been vary goot, and vary kind. Does he tink dat a Cr-reator who makes de hawks kill ze poor leetle bir-rds is goot and kind? For myself, I do not tink so."

My exact answer I forget; but I do remember that when I sat down again, instead of the protesting murmurs which had greeted the German Fräulein, there was a very hearty round of applause, during which Fräulein "Ungläubig" glared round her indignantly at her fellow-members.

At any rate, I tried to show how happy caged birds could be under proper circumstances, and to point out that though I had been very presumptuous in addressing an assemblage of learnéd ladies—they were all blue stockings, more or less—I hoped I was

not presumptuous enough to dictate to the Almighty Father, or to express by any thought or word of mine that I knew better than He.

As to caging birds, provided always that they are well fed, kept clean, and thoroughly cared for, one must remember that they cannot reason like human beings, nor, I should imagine, can they look backward or forward in actual thought.

But no one should keep a bird in a cage unless they understand its needs, and are prepared to see that it is really looked after.

In their wild life they have for the most part the freshest of food and the purest of water.

Great care, therefore, must be taken that in their tame caged life—wild and untameable birds should not be caged—the water vessels are carefully rinsed and purified, and the food of the freshest and the best quality.

I remember my indignation when I was brought by the housekeeper—an old and faithful servant who meant *so* well—three large, and quite rotten pears, which she said could not be sent in for dessert, but which she thought would do for the Pekin robins and other birds in the aviary !

And this from one who is devoted to birds, and to whom I am deeply grateful for her constant and exemplary carefulness with two or three special favourites. Why *should* dainty birds like Pekin robins, &c., be supposed to appreciate rotten pears, any more than we do ?

Birds often die in cages owing to a lack of reasoning forethought with regard to their food.

Let me finish this chapter with its subject.

It is only a week to Christmas Day, and my caged nightingale, although the days are cold and gloomy, is singing every day, and all day long, quite brightly and fearlessly, his voice gaining in strength and compass. He hops into his bath, the water of which is quite cold, where he flutters and splashes quite happily. He is two years old, and was caught as a "brancher" —a term already explained.

His plumage is smooth and perfect, and his cage is of Indian manufacture—long, and rather low, open on all sides and on the top, made of split bamboo.

A nightingale should never be kept in a wire cage, nor any other insectivorous bird either, for their plumage is much more easily damaged, and their tail or wing feathers broken, than bullfinches' or canaries', &c.

In Germany, Austria, and Italy nightingales are perhaps more frequently kept as cage birds than they are in England. It is not an altogether uncommon thing to find one in a cage, hung up in the verandah of some hotel or inn.

Now, most birds want to settle themselves down in new surroundings and amongst new faces before they commence singing; but the very next morning, in all probability, your shama begins to warble and tune up, if not the same afternoon.

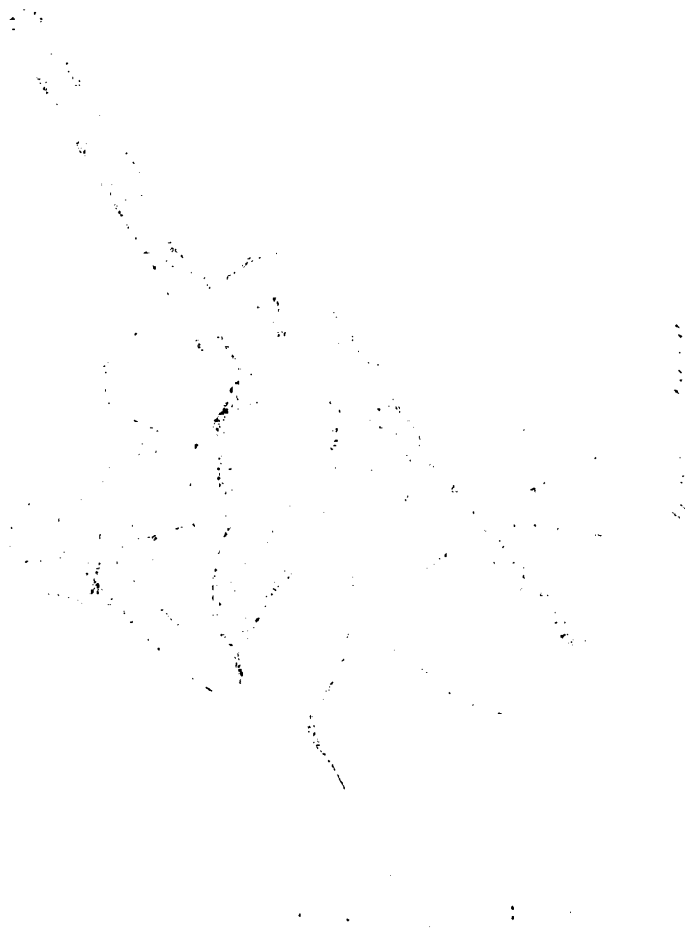
If you want to keep him in good health and plumage, you will put him in a really roomy cage; a wicker dove's cage, made to order, with the canes less widely built apart than is usual in "reach-me-downs," would be as good as any, with a zinc sand-drawer; or else a long wooden cage, also like the wicker one, made of open bars on all sides and at the top.

The cage, if a really nice one is required, can be made of mahogany, with neat cane or wooden bars—not wire, at any rate; and it must be long enough for your shama to be able to hop on two perches, placed half-way up the cage, so that on whichever perch he is sitting his tail does not touch the bars at either end.

He must have a roomy bath to hang on to the door, and he doesn't eat seed.

And although he doesn't, he is little or no more trouble to keep than a bullfinch.

I rather mistrust people in their love for birds when they say. "I'm *so* fond of birds; now do recommend me a nice bird. I don't like canaries, you know; they scream so. I can't have a bird that eats messy food: meat and those horrid creepy-crawly things—'mealworms' don't you call them?—those sort of birds are such a trouble. I want some nice bird that everybody else doesn't keep; I *do* like having something that most other people don't have; something that



Now, most birds want to settle themselves in their surroundings and ar... get new tunes before they begin singing; but the very next morning after they, your shama begins to warble away at the same afternoon.

If you want to keep him in good health and spirits you will put him in a really roomy cage, not a small cage, made to order, with the bars further apart than is usual in "reach-me-down" cages. It may be as good as any, with a zinc-and-brass tray, but a long wooden cage, also like the wicker ones, with bars on all sides and at the top.

The cage, if a really nice one is required, is made of mahogany, with neat cane or wire netting, net wire, at any rate; and it must be long enough for your shama to be able to hop on two perches placed half-way up the cage, so that on whichever perch he is sitting his tail does not touch the bars at either end.

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Indian Shama

will sing well, and that won't fidget too much. I had some little birds, some sort of waxbill, or something like that, and they fidgeted so *dreadfully*; but I must get something, for I am devoted to birds."

All this time, I try to get a word in edgeways. I omit mentioning to what sex my inquirer belongs, trusting that no one will discover.

You laugh! Why should any one? When you have to guess over two things, there is always a chance that you may pick on the wrong one, like the merry-thought bone of a chicken!

Well! perhaps I suggest a crested pou-pou, or a spotted popinjay, or some other mischievous invention of my ornithological brain. "Oh! that sounds very curious and rare. I've heard of a *Hoopoe*, but never of a pou-pou; what a curious name! *Do* tell me all about it. Does it eat seed, and does it sing; I want a *small* bird, you know." Then I have to pull myself together, saying that after all perhaps the crested pou-pou wouldn't do, as it feeds chiefly on mice and cocoa-paste!!

So I suggest African singing finches, or pope cardinals, &c. But, for all that, I still maintain that a shama would be no more trouble, and far more pleasurable.

Nowadays dealers, such as those who are represented by the Century Bird Stores[1]—(no! I don't owe them anything, except gratitude—so there!)—As I was saying, some dealers make most excellent food for insectivorous birds, all ready prepared and dished up in

[1] 43 Bedford Hill, Balham, S.W.

very rapidly uttered ; there is no trilling, but rather a flowing roulade.

The hen bird is very prettily and softly coloured ; her mate's bold tints of black and chestnut are " washed " into delicate mouse-brown and grey.

Her tail is not nearly so long, but long enough to show that she is a shama.

One very favourite cock bird that I once had used to sit on our housekeeper's lap—she was an old family nurse in former days, so that he probably felt the sympathy of that lap—where he would sit with one foot tucked up in the feathers of his breast, warbling.

He was a beauty.

Shamas have nested in England in captivity, but the great difficulty of successfully rearing insectivorous birds in an aviary is that of being able to supply sufficient insect food.

You can, if venturesome enough, let a tame shama fly about in the garden, for the mealworm box will generally bring him back again.

He will thoroughly enjoy a flight of that sort, but of course you must be sure of your bird, and he must first of all be well acquainted with his surroundings.

* * * * *

There is a bird, a very familiar one in some parts of India and China, which is nearly related to the shama, namely, the magpie robin—as European settlers call it—or dhyal bird—perhaps dayal ?—a bird which, like the shama, makes a capital cage pet, and can be from time to time purchased in England.

He is easier to keep in health than a nightingale. Teach him to come out of his cage by putting a mealworm outside his door, and he will soon learn to fly about the room. The exercise will add much to his health and strength. A mealworm thrown into his cage will soon bring him home again; hurrying in as quickly as a lady in her best frock, when a thunder shower has caught her in her garden.

Now shamas live in India—in jungle country, so they say—and I know little or nothing about the jungle; but I suppose it to be a more or less big tangle of trees and shrubs, and giant grasses and creepers, amongst which are apes and peacocks, tigers and elephants, leopards and cats of different kinds, not to mention snakes, tarantulas, scorpions, centipedes, and other poisonous and revolting creepy-crawlies. There dwell the shamas, probably the finest songsters of the bamboo groves, their mellow notes ringing out: the nightingales of India.

It is a very fine voice, at one time soft *sotto-voce* warblings; at others, loud and flute-like.

His note of alarm is a sharp "tzet-tzet-tzet," uttered vociferously as he chucks his long tail high over his back, and down again, showing conspicuously the white tail coverts as he does so.

His flight is strong and quick.

In a cage he will burst into song at unexpected moments, perhaps long after he has been apparently silenced by the drawing of curtains and lighting of lamps.

The notes, when he has the loud pedal down, are

Indian Shama

[illegible]; there is no trilling, but a [illegible]

[illegible] very prettily and softly co[illegible]
[illegible] of black and chestnut [illegible]
[illegible] mouse-brown and grey.
[illegible] rarely so long, but long enough [illegible]
[illegible] shama.

[illegible] cock bird that I once had [illegible]
[illegible] keeper's lap—she was an old fa[illegible]
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[illegible] him back again.

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like the shama, makes a capital cage pet, and ca[illegible]
from time to time purchased in England.

Dyal Bird. (male & female.)

is English name implies, he is uncommonly
agpie in colouring, indeed the black and white
umage is distributed in almost exactly similar
s.

t and white it is, lacking the beautiful
t purples and greens of our British magpie's
d tail.

ze he is a little larger than a shama; but his
ough longish, is not nearly so long as the
ird's.

ly every dhyal that I have come across has
the same pugnacious disposition, pecking at
gers, puffing out his feathers, and defiantly
. But his warbling is not nearly so melodious
ied as the shama's.

e are much harsher notes at moments, and his
te or call, expressive of anger, is also somewhat

ne is a really taking little fellow, with his dis-
plumage, his perky ways, and his cheery song.
is not sure that the hen bird isn't prettier, for
e is black and white, she is softest mole-skin
nd silvery grey.

ler a little than her mate, and shorter in the

een the hen shama and dhyal bird there is a
mily resemblance.

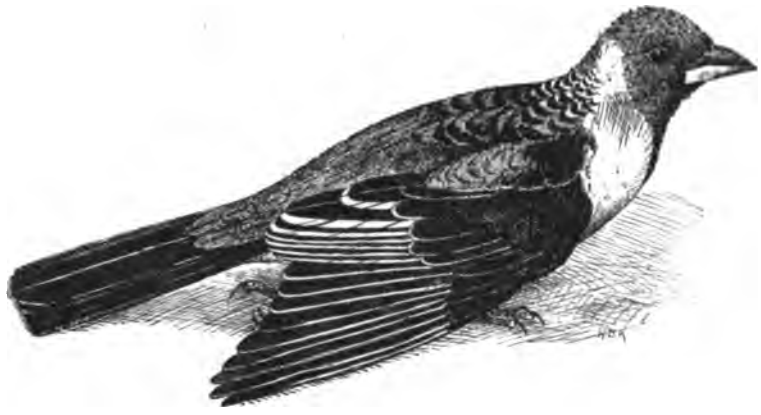
ly, on seeing my male dhyal bird, at once said,
ou have a magpie robin, quite an old friend to
member them in our garden in Penang, when
child."

There, and in other gardens of the East, the dh birds build their nests in holes of walls or other sm recesses in human habitations, as well as in hollows trees.

Feed a dhyal in the same way as a shama. wonder whether the latter is the hardiest in captivi or easier to keep? *I* have found it so.

But dhyal birds will also nest in an aviary, a have, in one instance at any rate, successfully rear some young ones.

In China it is said that he is a favourite cage bir and that one may see some old pig-tailed Chang Wa Wow—or whatever his name may happen to be carrying his pet dhyal in a picturesque little cage bamboo, in which the bird sits and sings to h master.



POPE CARDINAL

CHAPTER VII

VIRGINIAN NIGHTINGALES

"It must have a kind of human facility in adopting itself to climate, as it has human domesticity of temper."

MOST people who have visited bird shops know the jolly, flaring Virginian nightingale —Cardinal Grosbeak is his other name—by sight.

He is as conspicuous as a Life Guardsman walking down Knightsbridge.

Bright scarlet, which colour deepens by a wash of brown in it on the upper parts, he is not easily hidden from view; and his pretty crest, raised or depressed at will, with his big hawfinch-bill of sealing-wax red, edged round with a small black mask, enhances the general flaring and perky appearance.

He is called a nightingale, not because he is one in

any way whatever, but because in his bright and far-sounding song he introduces a "jug-jug-jug," which slightly resembles the same notes in a nightingale's.

Like so many male birds, he is very much more brilliant than the female, who, keeping only the scarlet bill of her mate, is brownish red in the larger part of her plumage, which is paler and browner on her breast; so that her red beak is more conspicuous, and gives her an intemperate appearance.

Seed eaters to a large extent, yet very gladly devouring fruit and mealworms, Virginian nightingales should not be kept on seed alone in cages.

Perhaps only in large outdoor aviaries do the male birds keep the really brilliant red of the wild state; and those that are caged in rooms more often than not become very dulled in their colouring after they have moulted.

What sounds on the face of it improbable is the fact that although I have never been to America, in parts of which the Virginian nightingale is a native, yet I have known these birds intimately in a wild state—or shall we call it one of perfect freedom?

I had put a pair of these birds into a pheasantry, situated in a wilder part of the flower garden where there is a rockery, and, besides the large trees in which the rooks build, a thick sprinkling of mountain ash, laburnums, and thorns.

The Virginians used to make attempts at nesting, but they never seemed very much in earnest, so that it came to my mind one day to open the door of the wire pen where they lived and chance the rest. After

an hour had passed, the cock bird in a flight round the pen found his way out, immediately flitting on to a mountain ash tree, where he began "jug jugging" in a most sprightly voice.

It was a bright sunny spring day.

The hen bird was in a great state of mind, and flew backwards and forwards, uttering her sharp-sounding call note, which is rather like that of a robin. Then it struck me that it might be advisable to allow the male to become accustomed to this life of full freedom, keeping his wife as an hostage, so that he would be less tempted to wander too far, were he disposed so to do.

In the meanwhile he would be able to take his bearings, and, if he thought his surroundings pleasant ones, perhaps fix upon a convenient site for a nest.

So I shut the pheasantry door with his lady the right side of it.

She, I suppose, thought it the wrong one!

In a few minutes he flew to the top of the wire roof, where he seemed to be doing his best to get back again. A day or two afterwards, when he still continued to keep about, singing gaily amongst the bushes, and flitting from tree to tree, I liberated his mate, much to his joy, which he manifested by sidling up to her with quivering pinions, singing and whispering in her ear.

The following morning was a typical one for the beauties of spring in England, when it is fine and warm.

The rooks were clamorous under a cloudless sky, amongst their nests at the top of the elms, fighting for

the mastery over some particular site, or wheeling round with beak-fulls of building material.

Beneath, where the fresh growth of emerald grass was studded with yellow celandine, two or three golden pheasants were tilting round each other, displaying their gorgeous ruffs, barred in black and gold, and their saffron backs.

Thrushes were piping loudly, and blackbirds were fluting amongst the chestnut trees.

A hundred voices came from amongst the shrubberies, where all seemed life and brightness.

And there, perched on the tip top of an ancient thorn tree, that grew in solitary grandeur upon the lawn, was the cock Virginian, facing the sun, in the light of which glistened his scarlet coat.

A rare sight in an English garden.

But where was his mate?

The fact that he seemed so well at ease, and so thoroughly at home, reassured any qualms in my mind: yet I could nowhere hear her call, or catch a glimpse of her.

So I went further into the garden, where syringa bushes and clipped yew hedges, amongst sycamores, hollies, elms, and chestnuts, hid winding paths until one approaches a rock garden.

Here grew so many favourites: auriculas, primulas, lilies of the valley, ferns of many kinds, and the great Crambe cordifolia, with, later on, its giant spray of snowy honey-scented flowers, as well as sedums and other rock-loving plants.

Mesembryanthemums, and crassullas, and the hand-

some arctotus grandiflora were there too—as summer visitors. The rocks were scattered about, as on a mountain side, so that all were not heaped upon each other, but here and there isolated, with turf interspersed, from which sprang up, as nature likes to have them, narcissi and tulips, appearing here and there, just as they would grow without one's aid.

So much more beautiful than in the formal beds fronting the house.

In the pool beneath a cavernous recess goldfish were swimming; and a blackbird, which had been bathing there, flew hurriedly away with clamorous notes of alarm as I appeared.

As I pass a small yew tree—a mere sapling—what should fly from it but the hen Virginian nightingale? Peering into the thicker part of the bush—for it is little more—I am astonished to see a sufficient gathering of fine roots and twigs to show that a nest is being built; and in such a manner, with such a mixture of materials, that I at once feel sure it is the work of no ordinary inhabitant of the garden.

Yet can it be the Virginian lady?

She has only been liberated during four and twenty hours, about seven of which have been without light.

It puzzles me, this rapid decision and quick carrying out of architectural plans on her part.

Certainly she was there, and certainly the gathered rootlets are freshly arranged.

But I must bide my time, for she is fussing about amongst the laurels and lilacs close by, and so I walk on to see after other things.

to look again the next [illegible]
surance that the Virginian

[illegible] cock bird is, for I hear h[illegible]
[illegible] om a sycamore tree in th[illegible]
thicket [illegible] ry.

[illegible] discovery, even the risk o[illegible]
mak[illegible] eir nest will not keep th[illegible]
from [illegible]

[illegible] for as I approach, a fl[illegible]
of [illegible] shows [illegible] ale bird flitting from th[illegible]
sea, [illegible] the [illegible] parently almost finished
It is [illegible] a compac[illegible] ture, and decidedly fra[illegible]
The [illegible] which [illegible] rosed the foundation a[illegible]
continued for the nest, which is finally lined wit[illegible]
dead leaves, amongst which are twined a few bl[illegible]
horse hairs.

Well done, American cousins!

There is an idea that strange birds are always mobbed by residents, but I never saw any bird attempt to do so in this case; yet one would have thought the red coat of the male bird would have attracted as much attention and enmity as red coats of British soldiers would have amongst Boers in the Transvaal. Perhaps owing to the Virginians having been in the pheasantry for some time, the birds of the neighbourhood had come to know them.

Two days more and the first egg was laid. A long very oval egg, pale grey, with chocolate-tinted spots, intermixed with small darker grey blotches.

Now for self-control!

UNIV OF
CALIFORNIA

I keep the fact of that nest a profound secret, and I determine not to go near it for a week; at the end of which time, walking quietly past the bush, I can just see the scarlet bill of the hen bird, where the sunshine, glinting in, catches it.

If nothing more comes of it, I feel something has been achieved.

In a Buckinghamshire garden I have seen a Virginian nightingale seated on her nest! Before she hatched her eggs I found out there were four; and never did I feel more ornithologically uplifted than when I saw, after a fortnight's incubation, that four young ones were alive and well.

Neither did I ever feel more despondingly downhearted than when, after a week's healthy growth on their part, I discovered that some marauding wretch of a rat, or a cat, or a squirrel, had done away with the whole boiling! (as they say).

Or was it a jay?

Whatever it was, my feelings were those of rage and despair.

In about a week those plucky birds had commenced another nest, which I discovered by quiet watching.

In a less public spot of the shrubbery, and in a securer position, the second nest was built. It was in a holly tree, in a depending branch, a foot or two above one's head—they never seem to build at any great height.

The laburnums were coming into flower after the hen was steadily sitting, and the male bird used to

The Water Ouzel

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Ring Ouzel.

I again experimented with a pair of Virginian nightingales, by letting them have their freedom in the garden, and again, as in the former case, their behaviour was the same.

The nest which was built—which is now in the Rothschild Museum at Tring Park, with its three eggs—was placed in a box hedge bordering one of the shrubbery paths.

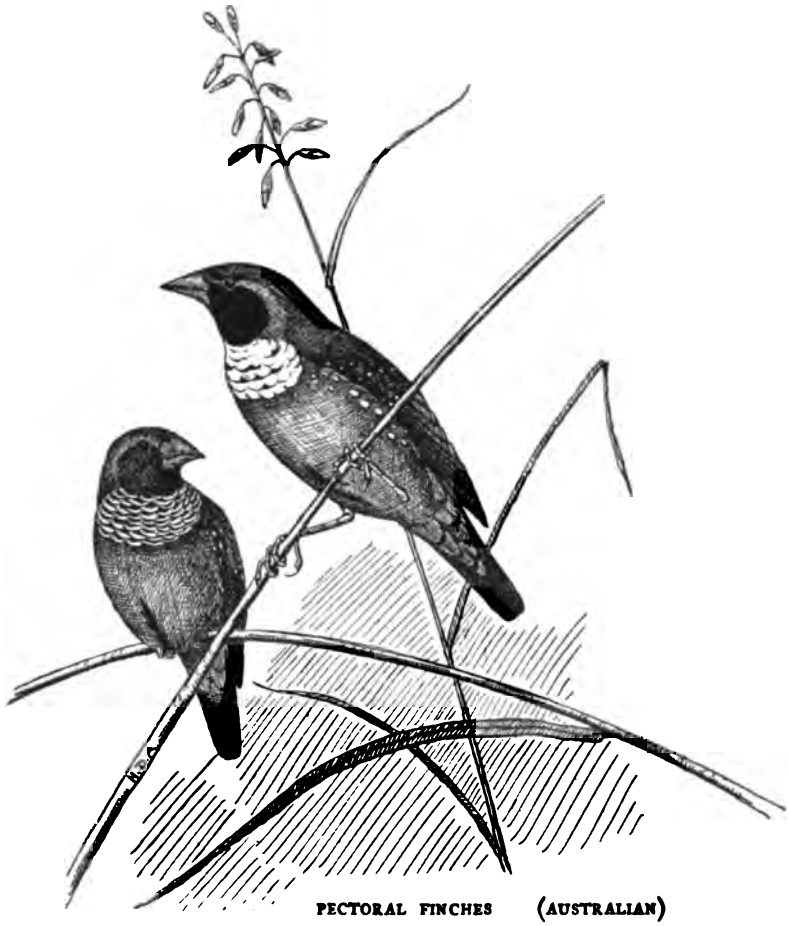
Unfortunately a tremendous June thunderstorm, with buckets of rain, seems to have been too much for the poor hen bird; and on the following morning I found the nest deserted and soaked through, with the eggs quite cold.

The whole structure was carefully removed, and the eggs equally carefully blown.

In one there was a young bird, which ought to have hatched in another two or three days. By dint of leaving it out of doors where a colony of ants could get to it, the egg-shell was finally cleared of its contents, and the clutch of three safely preserved.

As far as I know, these instances are the only ones of Virginian nightingales nesting and breeding in full freedom in England.

Such experiments are most interesting, and might possibly be successful with birds such as blue American robins, and perhaps Pekin robins—the leiothrix of India and the Himalayan mountains—green cardinals and red-crested, as well as certain kinds of parakeets.



PECTORAL FINCHES (AUSTRALIAN)

CHAPTER VIII

RING OUZELS AND WATER OUZELS

"However dressed, and wherever born, the ouzel is essentially a mountain-torrent bird."

HOW few people know much about one of the handsomest British birds—the ring ouzel; partly because he is not a winter resident, he is very local, and he is seldom seen as a cage bird.

Ouzels & Water Ouzel

[illegible] lives in the very wildest p[illegible]
[illegible] where he arrives in [illegible]
[illegible] in his migration like swi[illegible]
[illegible] are more apt to rest on the[illegible]
[illegible] though they may not be [illegible]
[illegible] perhaps nor to be wonder[illegible]
[illegible] his very beautiful cock [illegible]
[illegible] and what country he come[illegible]
[illegible] no idea that it was an [illegible]
d.

It [illegible] and purposes a "blac[illegible]
[illegible], but his feathers below [illegible]
[illegible] which stretches across his b[illegible]
[illegible] with white, and his bill, [illegible]
[illegible] brilliant as his cousin's.

[illegible] parts of Western England, [illegible]
where [illegible] and streams, are favourite dwell[illegible]
[illegible] of the [illegible] ouzel.

And [illegible] Wales, and Derbyshire, p[illegible]
[illegible] Cumberland, and other northern counti[illegible]
Scotland, where you can find him right away [illegible]
[illegible] Wye.

[illegible] all about the Peak, is a sure [illegible]
and beautiful Dovedale resounds with his piping.

As you enter the valley just below the "[illegible] Walton" Hotel, where the Dove comes rip[illegible] along between walls of rock, eddying and swi[illegible] round and over its stony bed, one of the most love[illegible] views in English scenery is before you.

Above, the rocks are scattered amongst a luxuri[illegible] growth of trees, which, overhanging the river, [illegible]

Ring Ouzel.

here and there reflected on the surface of the pools, where the trout lie hidden near mossy banks and beneath the shelter of stones.

A rough pathway leads you, now up, now down, where the silvered stems of birch trees shine out against the more distant green of the wooded glen.

And above all the beautiful growth of wild woodland, overhang the beetling rocks, for which Derbyshire is famous ; backed by a May-day sky.

Every stretch of the rushing stream is claimed by a pair of dippers—the pretty bob-tailed water ouzel—with white chemisette and back of purple-brown. There sits one on a moss-grown boulder in mid-stream, bobbing up and down, whilst his mate is diving beneath the troubled surface of the crystal water in search of caddis worms and larvæ.

Now he is off with rapid arrow-like flight, and shrill but musical pipe.

He has settled again, but is almost invisible amongst that strand of shining stones and washed-up sticks, so closely does his plumage resemble his surroundings.

There ! his mate has joined him.

She is sitting close under the opposite bank, where the moss hangs thickly over, shaded and cooled by sycamore and beech trees, and both birds show signs of anxiety. Doubtless there is a nest close by ; indeed, you may be actually looking at it, mistaking it for an extra bunch of moss and withered leaves, and passing it by.

I put on my wading boots, and staggering against

the strength of the current, with a feeling that I shall either suddenly plunge into a deep hole or be carried off my weighted legs, search diligently along the bank and amongst the river stones where sticks and leaves have accumulated, but in vain.

No nest is more cunningly built than a dipper's. We saw one—a nest of the previous year probably—which was suspended about a foot above the stream, amongst some overhanging branches, and which, with its entrance out of our sight, exactly resembled a bunch of withered grass and leaves caught by the winter's floods, and left there; more especially as such accumulations were collected on several branches in close proximity.

A clear case of an intuitive power of imitation on the part of the water ouzels.

Wading out, I found the entrance of the domed nest—much like a giant wren's—where a thick thatch overhung it, so that only when one put one's fingers in, was it discernible.

Inside this *negligée* exterior all was neat and compact; so much so, that I began to doubt its having yet been used.

There is a peculiar fascination in the birds that are only found where mountain torrents whirl impetuously amongst grey boulders, where nature is more left to her own devices, and beauty unadorned.

It is there that you find the nest of the grey wagtail, the dipper, and perhaps the pretty pied fly-catcher.

All about Dovedale the wily carrion crow builds

his solitary nest in some conspicuous position in a tree top, before even the young leaves have budded.

There he sits croaking ominously, a raven in miniature—black, wicked, and marauding. But he has held his own more successfully than the raven, who in England is now an uncommon bird.

In the rocky heights of Dovedale the ring ouzels build, and unless you see the birds as evident possessors of their nest, the latter is very easily mistaken for a blackbird's, both in the matter of the materials and style of architecture, as well as the eggs.

In the distance, up a rocky cutting above us, as we keep to the winding path, we hear the fluting of the ouzel, somewhat resembling in voice his cousin, the blackbird, but less melodious, yet attuning delightfully with the wildness of the scenery, accompanied by the swishing of running water below us.

Leaving this fairy glen, we can clamber up to the downland above, where stone walls divide the sheep runs and pastures.

If you look carefully along the walls, in the hollows amongst the stones you may find a ring ouzel's nest, and perhaps a wheatear's, to get at which you would probably have to pull out many stones. But happily the mere passing boy—a thing of mischief and destruction—does not venture to do so, and the pretty white-backed wheatears rear their brood in safety.

A very clever bird is the wheatear at concealing his nesting-place.

Like the black redstart in the Swiss mountains,

he often requires carefully watching through field-glasses.

But the ring ouzel often betrays the whereabouts of his nest by over-anxiety and clamorous fussiness. With blackbird-like calls and much flirting of tails, a pair will come round you as you trespass on their ground.

To lie still and simply watch, is a joy that the ordinary unobserver of birds doesn't know.

Just as we are told that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, in the future life; so, too, some in the present seem to have already entered upon this inheritance in part, which others as yet find no particular delight in.

Seeing, they see not; and hearing, they hear not; is such a truth.

Just as men and women with great artistic powers evidently discern shades, tints, and colours which are hidden to the ordinary human being, so, too, there are some who in wild life and country walks will be more keenly alive to birds' voices and ways, as well as to beauties of flowers, concealed for the most part from the tourist throng.

Can these divine joys have entered into the spirit of those who, having devoured their sandwiches and drunk their ginger-pop by the banks of the Dove, or amongst the bracken and the oaks of royal Windsor, or the Glens of Killicrankie, scatter their grease-stained paper wrappings in vulgar confusion around?

'Arry and 'Arriet, what '*ave* yer done?
You've cut yer "noimes" in the turf:
You've flung yer bottles of ginger-beer,
To float in the river's surf;
Why scatter your paper bags about,
Because you've finished yer 'am?
Is *that* all you come to Dovedale for,
To devour yer tarts and jam?
You've shocked the ouzels amongst the rocks,
You've made the wild rose blush,
You've frightened the birds in the midst of their songs,
And stilled the sweet notes of the thrush.
The hills resound with hysterical yells,
Your screams have carried a mile;
It makes one think of the poet's words
That, "only man is vile."

* * * * *

In the wild hills of Sutherlandshire the ring ouzel can be seen.

Perched on the summit of a boulder, round which stretches down the mountain side a tangled growth of heather, bog myrtle, and ling, his showy cravatte of white shines conspicuously against his black coat.

You may be lying hid from the deer, waiting as a herd comes browsing, until a royal is within shot, or hungrily devouring your frugal lunch at the edge of a trickling stream, and the ouzel cock flits uneasily about, warning the members of his family of the intruder's presence. A mountain bird, giving a touch of life where at times all is so solitary.

There is nothing finer in its own particular way than this deer forest, barren of trees and severe in beauty, the home of the ptarmigan amongst the rocky mist-veiled summits, and of the merganser, which dives in the mountain tarn to feed upon the trout that have

darted up the burn from pool to pool until they have reached this *cul de sac*.

Further down is the meeting of the waters—Gobernuisgach—where, on a grassy plateau amongst the hills, the smoke curls up from the chimneys of the shooting-lodge.

With the clamouring notes of the startled ouzel, you wend your way home—happy, because behind you comes the pony, feeling his way carefully over the rough path with its rolling stones and pebbles, burdened as he is with the dead weight of your eighteen-stone stag, now no longer the monarch of the glen.

And as you look proudly back to count his points once more, you stop before you clamber down to announce the death of a "Royal."

Filled with exultation as you are, you still recall the sadness of his fall, when, sinking amongst the heather, the splendid beast seemed with glazing sight to look wistfully after the departing herd as they disappeared over the brow of the hill. Above your head soars a golden eagle, scenting the blood maybe.

And so you trudge home, wet and footsore—leaving the ouzel to pipe and flute where the red stag fell down—to your well-earned dinner and your rest.

So the night falls, ushering in the frolics of otters amongst the salmon in the burn, and the prowlings of wild cats from their lairs in the rocks.

And the northern lights dart upwards in the sky.

* * * * *

As a cage bird a ring ouzel is desirable, for if

reared from the nest he is steady, handsome, and cheery in song.

A large wicker cage is as good as any, and he loves a daily bath.

He is a hearty feeder, and likes grated carrot, previously boiled, added to his insectivorous mixture. Potato, too, and scraps of raw beef are additional luxuries—and mealworms, of course.

The hen bird is a "washed" edition of her mate in colouring: her white collar not being nearly so pure in tint; but the whole effect is soft and pretty.

She is not unlike a hen blackbird with a grey-white chemisette, but on closer inspection her breast feathers are seen to have pale lacings.

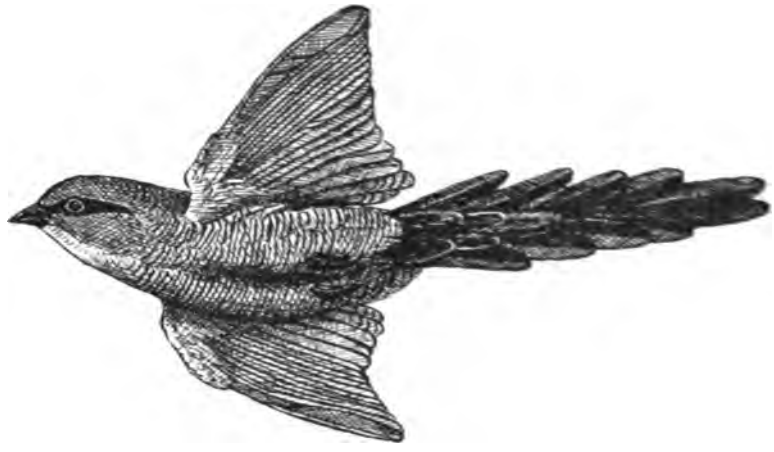
A pair of ring ouzels that I had in an out-door aviary commenced nest-building one spring; but their efforts did not amount to very much, although the hen bird was repeatedly carrying about beaksful of grass and leaves. The white gorget of the male is very much whiter in the summer than in the winter, and his bill, which is darkish after the breeding season is over, again grows bright saffron yellow on its return. There is no actual spring moult, as in the case of the pied rock thrush (*Petrocincla Saxatilis*), but the edges of the feathers seem to wear away, leaving the whole colouring purer and brighter, unless it be that there is a flow of pigment to deepen or heighten certain tints.

The same change of plumage occurs with the blue thrush, in whose case such a flow of colouring matter—at least in the head feathers—would seem to take place; for the whole head changes from smalt blue to quite a

pale "old china" blue—as I have already mentioned in the chapter on that bird—a tint which certainly does not exist even in the more concealed part of the feathers after his autumnal moult.

Why, in the case of two birds so closely allied as the blue thrush and the rock thrush, the former should save himself the trouble of a vernal moult, whilst the latter sheds every feather, except the flight feathers and those of the tail, is curious.

It is, as a rule, only by keeping certain birds alive that one is able to discover the various changes of plumage and the manner in which they are effected.



ST. HELENA WAXBILL

CHAPTER IX

GOLDEN-CRESTED WRENS AND TITMICE

"Dainty and delightful creatures in all their ways,—voice only dubitable, but I hope not a shriek or a squeak."

AN experience that I had in rearing the tiniest of European birds was an interesting one.

Wandering one bright June day amongst the wilder parts of a Buckinghamshire garden, where for centuries the birds have sung, and built their nests, and died, I found myself beneath the overhanging boughs of an old yew tree.

Happening to look upwards, immediately above my head I caught sight of a wee cup-nest hung on the under side of a branch, about eight feet from the ground.

At the same moment that I saw it, there came the sharp mouse notes of a golden-crested wren, querulously squeaking in a nervous manner.

In another moment the tiny bird flitted down within a few feet of my face, peering at me with beady eyes. She was quickly followed by her mate, in whose beak was some small insect.

Apparently he hadn't seen me until then, for he hurriedly disappeared, leaving his wife to defend the position; and his sharp notes of alarm sounded out from amongst the thicket close at hand.

Standing perfectly still for a while, I was able to see the pretty little hen bird as she boldly hopped about and crept amongst the twigs.

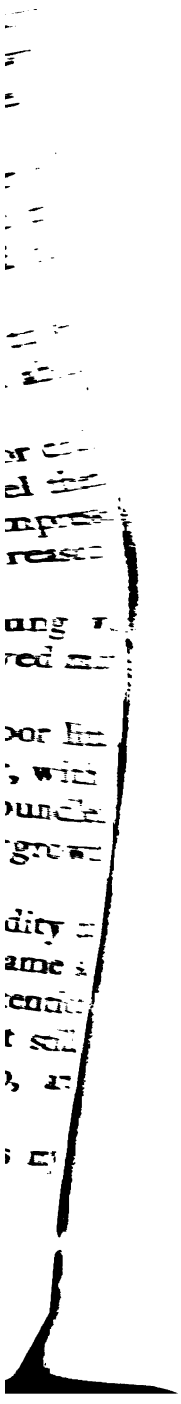
That there were young ones was evident, nor could I resist putting my fingers into the nest to feel them. There was a solid lump of tiny bodies, compressed with timidity at this strange intrusion, and by reason of the alarm notes of the parents.

The bough under which the wee nest hung was easily pulled downwards, but my doing so proved more than the wrenlets could bear.

They were all but ready to fly, but now, poor little chaps, their flight was somewhat premature; for, with a confused fluttering of tiny wings, out they all bundled, helter-skelter, taking refuge amongst the undergrowth and weeds of the ground.

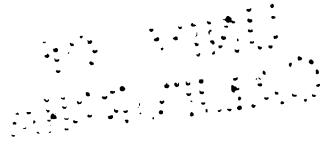
This tragedy and rout quite threw all timidity on the parents' part to the winds, for they both came so close to me in their endeavours to distract my attention that I could have touched them had they kept still, but golden-crested wrens, except when asleep, are never so.

To try and find some of the little ones was my



Crested Wrens

Golden Crested Wrens.



next endeavour—a difficult task, for they had wriggled away into nettles and grass.

But by careful search I at last found three—there were seven or eight in all, I believe—and I was not proof against the temptation of taking them with a hope of rearing them.

Their age was an awkward one.

It was more than probable that they would sulk. And they did, for a few hours!

After that, one more bold or more hungry than the others, suddenly stretched up his neck, encouraged by chirpings on my part, opened a tiny mouth of brightest orange, and received therein an atom of raw beef. This apparently pleased him so much, that down the orange lane it went, and up went his head for more, as he uttered a minute jarring squeak. My hopes were raised.

His example was beneficial.

A second baby wren put up its head, with open bill, and his hunger likewise was gratified.

The difficulty was to place such tiny pieces of food in such tiny mouths, but much practice with other birds no doubt made the task an easier one.

On the following morning I found the poor little fellows were evidently suffering from cold, although they had been tucked up in some flannel for the night. So I fetched a hot-water bottle in its red jacket, and placed them on it.

The effect was magical.

Their feathers, which had become puffed out, all tightened up; their eyes brightened; and they stretched

out their small wings to catch the invigorating heat, as a bird stretches out its wings to sun itself. Then they sat up and began to preen themselves, fluttering about, and seeming extremely jolly.

One was smaller and less advanced than the others, and this poor "Dolly" died.

The other two prospered, and in a few days would sit side by side on one of my fingers.

They were most fascinating.

I used to give them bits of mealworm, as well as ants' eggs.

They were placed in a cage, the bars of which were of cane, and fairly close together; but one day a small gold-crest popped through them without the slightest difficulty, and, what is more, popped through the open window as easily, and lived happily ever afterwards.

At least I hope so!

I never saw him again; ungrateful little bird! His little brother survived only a year, after which time, he turned up his little toes.

He was the jolliest little bird, without the slightest fear, and full of curiosity, always peering through the bars of his cage to see what was going on outside. His gold crown appeared with his first autumnal moult; until then his head was a dull green along with his body.

When alarmed in any way he could compress the feathers of his crest until there was only a tiny streak of saffron yellow edged with black.

At other times it would widen out and show very plainly what he was.

Whole mealworms were too big for him, so I

used to scald them, and squeeze out the insides, which come away quite easily from within the skin.

The little gold-crest used to cling to the bars of his cage and peck out the contents as I held the skin in my fingers.

Such an operation may sound very nasty, but food for birds must be studied as much as food for human beings; and squeezing out mealworms' interiors isn't half so nasty as doing something of that sort to rabbits that are to be cooked for our dinners. "Oh! la, la!" as the French say.

The structure of a golden-crested wren's nest is very wonderful—quite as wonderful as that of another kind of Wren, of which there was only one, and that was *Regulus christopheros*, which, though at first sight may appear to mean a crested wren, does not. This was Christopher Wren, who built a wonderful nest, usually known as St. Paul's Cathedral. Well! as I was saying, the nest of *Regulus cristatus* is in its way equally marvellous. Not so lasting, it is true, as that of *R. christopheros*, but the architecture thereof is as much to be admired and wondered at.

R. christopheros, like the London sparrow, chose to build in the great metropolis; though, of course, when first constructed, it was more rural in its surroundings than to-day.

R. cristatus distinctly prefers the country, where in firs, and yews, and cedars, he finds that thickly-needled and flattened foliage, on branches beneath which he can hide his nest—a Turkish coffee-cup of moss, spiders' webs, and lichens.

And he hangs it immediately under the branch, which spreads over it protectingly; so that from above the nest is quite invisible, and even from underneath is often difficult to find.

The edges of it are woven round the twigs; and between the top of the nest and the overhanging branch there is just space enough, in some instances, for the little wren to creep on to her eggs.

And this tiny creep-mouse of a bird is very numerous in the British Isles, although by hundreds of people it is never noticed, whilst its faint squeaking notes don't reach their ears.

It is said that the island of Heligoland, that ornithological magnet set in the sea, is crowded on scarce occasions during October or November by countless thousands of golden-crested wrens, which must have the appearance of bushels of leaves blown across the ocean, as their minute bodies flutter down from the sky.

But if butterflies can cross the sea in migration, why not gold-crests?

Both cases are equally a subject of interest and admiration.

I have sometimes derived much pleasure in rearing young birds, allowing them as soon as they can fly to have their liberty in the garden, and there feeding them.

Of course they have come to look upon one as their means of sustenance and protection; and will continue to do so, in some instances, for a length of time.

My hoopoes are a case in point, already described. But I tried the same kind of thing with some ox-eye titmice, which, after rearing them from the age of ten days in the house, were allowed, as soon as they were strong on the wing, to fly about outside.

There were two, for I had by no means deprived their parents of all their progeny.

One would have thought that as soon as the young titmice had heard once more the call-notes of the old birds, they would have returned instinctively to them.

Yet, although the latter were close at hand, my head and shoulders for some time continued to be their point of vantage whenever I came into the garden and whistled for them.

And they made use of such perches even when I was playing at games on the lawn. A titmouse settling on one's lawn-tennis racquet as one is on the point of serving is embarrassing.

A pair of ox-eye tits were very fond of one of the nesting boxes, fixed in a Portugal laurel, and one summer, as many young ones seemed to come fluttering out as letters from a post-box at Christmas time. Strikingly handsome birds are these greater tits, with the bold black line running down the centre of their yellow breasts.

I recall my intense joy, when on a visit to Brighton in my boyhood, I was given a cage full of blue tomtits by my Mother.

She had taken me to a bird-show, and that which fascinated me most was this cage, open to the front

and in a portion of the top, and lined inside with Virginian cork.

In the centre, at the back, the cork was brought out in a circular form, so as to form a hollow within, and holes were bored for the birds to enter this snug retreat.

A small door at the back enabled one to peep in. The cage was tenanted by four little tom-tits, whose round heads, with their delicately-tinted caps of cobalt blue, peeped out from the holes; their bright beady eyes looking inquiringly at one.

The tiny and sharp black bill of a tom-tit adds considerably to his beauty and his perky expression. I departed from the show with an intense longing to possess that cage and its inmates, which desire I expect I probably expressed quite honestly and openly.

My joy was great when, after the show had closed, I found the cage on a table in my bedroom.

Another time I kept a pair of the lovely little bearded titmice, so different in many ways to other members of a fascinating family; if they really belong to it, which is doubtful.

But in a cage they are too fidgety and restless, giving one the idea that they are not happy, so I didn't keep them.

I have seen these birds hawked about the streets of Milan in February.

They are most lovely, and, if it were not for indefatigable egg stealers, would be far more common in England than they are.

Of course they are birds which show themselves very little in public, creeping and flitting about in the broad stretches of reeds in Cambridgeshire fens and Norfolk broads.

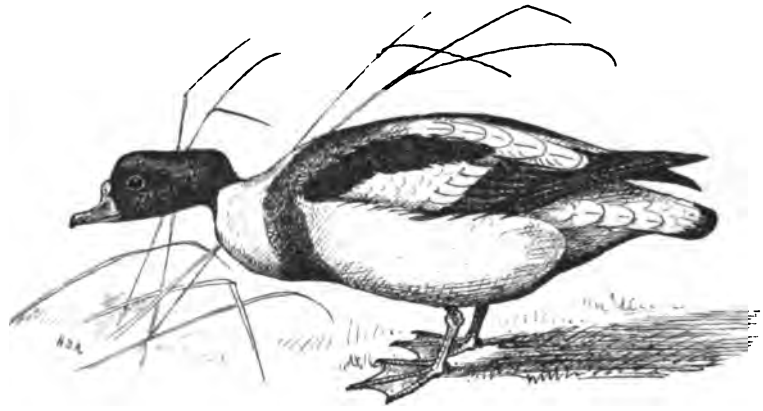
Sometimes people manage to keep in captivity the beautiful little long-tailed titmouse, but he never under those circumstances looks *quite* happy.

Nothing is more marvellous in bird architecture than the bottle-tit's nest, as this bird is called; and how such *tiny* bills manage to construct that wonderful oval of lichen-covered moss, with the little entrance in the side, is a mystery.

A flock of these little people in winter, as they follow each other in quick succession from tree to tree, is a pretty sight; their long slender tails showing conspicuously.

One would imagine that their faint squeaking notes are not far off the borderland of those sounds which fill the world, but which are beyond the reach of the human ear.

And a bat's squeak is shriller still.



SHELDRAKE

CHAPTER X

SEA AND SHORE BIRDS IN FREEDOM

"To begin with; of old
Man went naked and cold
Whenever it pelted and froze,
Till *we* showed him how feathers
Were proof against weathers,
With that, *he* bethought him of hose."

THERE are spots on our coasts, and there are sea-girt islands, which are a joy for ever, where Atlantic billows, rolling and heaving, finally dash their spray with a magnificent roar on to the rocks, and against the cliffs which intercept their course.

Thundering in, they are broken in prodigious volumes of froth; and repulsed, roll back, dragging with them the pebbles and stones of the shore.

On comes another giant billow, with white and curling crest, beneath which the water, where the sun is shining through, gleams with translucent green. Another thundering roar, and again a wave breaks up

with a noise of swishing and rattling of stones. A splendid fountain of spray, caused by the body of water colliding with a boulder, showers around. On the cliffs, where the gorse is golden against the delicate blue of the sky, where foxgloves are nodding pink blossoms amongst a tangle of honeysuckle and brambles, the rosy-breasted linnets are twittering merrily to the accompaniment of the music of the sea, and the skylarks are soaring in the air. Amongst the thrift, whose tufts of pink heads are massed in sweeps of colour, pipits are flitting and building their nests in some clump where the long coarse sand-grass affords concealment and shelter. There go the ships on the horizon of the troubled waters, their white sails gleaming in the sunshine.

Along the face of the cliffs clacking jackdaws are hopping and flying ; and perhaps, in a few favoured spots, the handsome choughs, now so scarce. There may also be some rock pigeons, which have founded a colony, and have built their fragile nests in some cavern, into the base of which at high tide the waves boom and dash.

In a sandy cove, round which the rocks rise in precipitous and picturesque confusion, sheltering the little golden bay from rough winds, groups of shore birds are tripping, and bobbing their heads.

As you stand on the edge of the cliff above, you can see the conspicuous pied plumage of the oyster-catchers, their scarlet bills gleaming in the sunshine, and their shrill pipings sound clearly in the still air of a bright May day.

Now a pair of them has taken flight, skimming with quickly beating wings over the surface of the waters, making a circle on the wing, in order to land once more in the sandy bay, where, after taking a few tripping steps, they stand bobbing their heads in much the same way as green plovers. Amongst some of the islands that are grouped in the Atlantic Ocean, off the western shores of the British Isles, countless thousands of sea birds of various species take up their abode in the spring time.

There, in many instances, no human beings dwell.

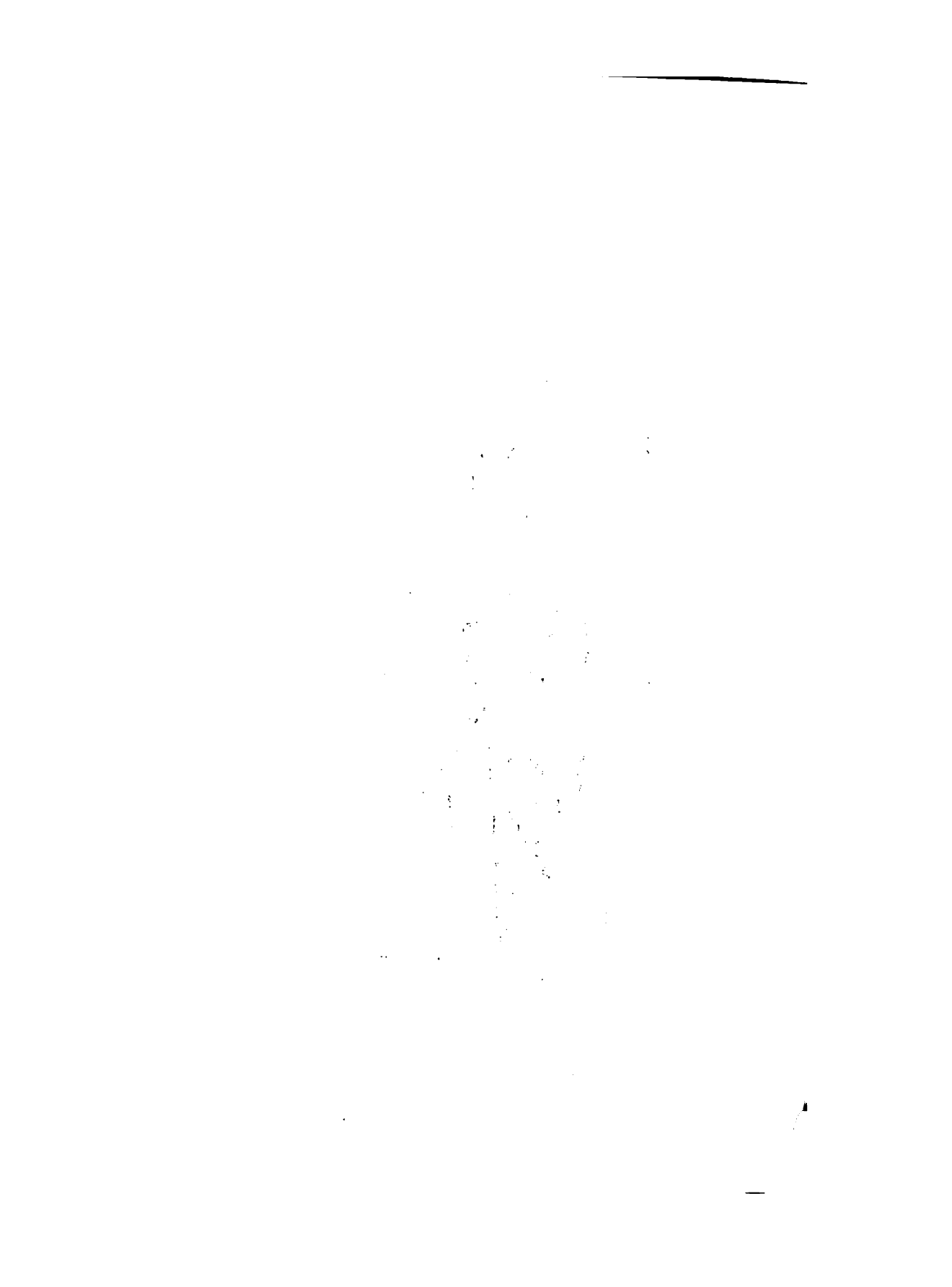
Nature in such spots left to her own devices is absolutely lovely, whether in rough weather or fine.

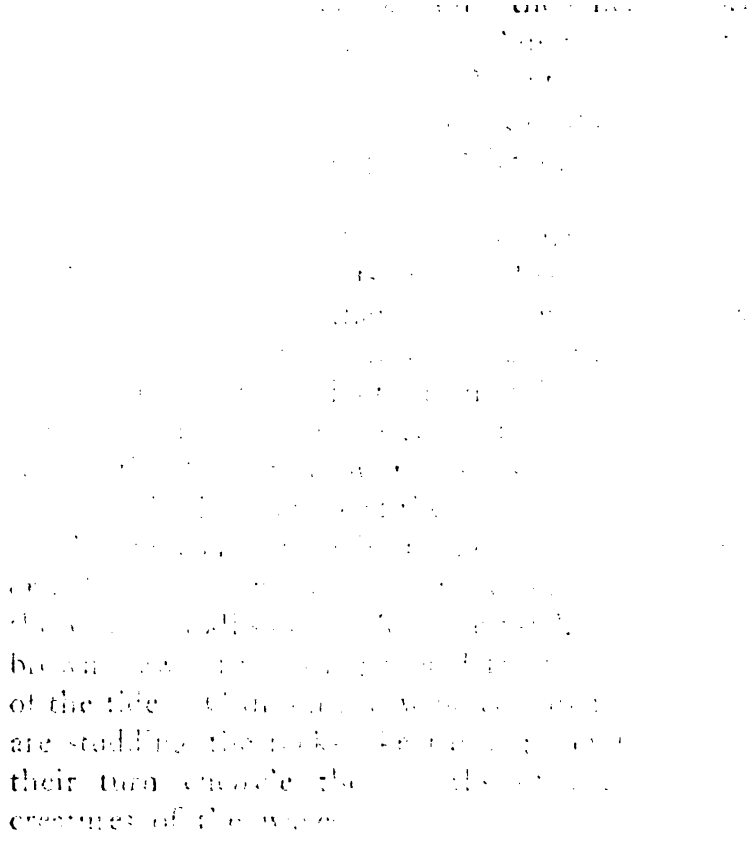
But perhaps it *is* on those cloudless May days towards the latter end of the month, amidst the rich purples and blues and greens of an ocean through which the Gulf Stream wends its course, that these sea-girt isles have attained the perfection of beauty.

As the keel of your boat scrapes up on the shingle, or is brought alongside some rocks affording a landing, the water on all sides is clear as crystal, and the golden-brown seaweed is tossing to and fro by the movement of the tide. Crimson and wine-coloured sea-anemones are studding the rocks like rubies; and turquoises in their turn encircle the mouths of these wonderful creatures of the waves.

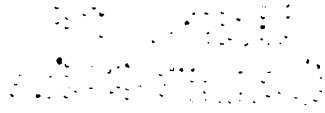
Others are floating on the surface amongst the seaweed—flesh-coloured ones, with mauve-tipped tentacles.

As you land, the rocks are slippery with blistered brown weed, which pops under your feet; whilst you





Sea Pie. (or Oystar-Catcher.)



have to be careful lest *you* pop under the waves, or, falling on the rocks, bruise yourself unpleasantly.

As on the ice, so on this glutinous and slippery sea-weed, your feet have a most provoking way of suddenly precipitating themselves above your head.

One doesn't laugh when it happens to oneself, but it is certainly very difficult to refrain from merriment when one of your companions is forced into some undignified position of that sort.

With ladies as companions most alarming accidents used to happen upon some of these western islands, where during a four months' stay I have acted as cicerone.

Some were eager to collect the lovely canary-coloured shells and delicate pink cowries, as well as many other sea-creatures' fairy houses tossed up by the sea, from which the tenants had disappeared.

I remember how one poor lady, elated at having picked up more rarities than usual, was standing on a rock not long laid bare by the outgoing tide, and proclaiming the invention of some especial treasure, when in the middle of her sentence there came a crash ! and a tableau !

The basket containing the shells flew one way ; the shells *every* way !

As for the lady herself—well ! I looked the *other* way !

A sad wreck !

And the poor lady had to be supported home with a sprained back.

Yet I laughed !

Why does one laugh at sad things ?

One's nerves give way, I suppose.

It was very mean and very ungallant; but laugh I did.

I remember, too—and that time I laughed immoderately—how another lady fell over a rock into a gorse bush; and, although she did not spoil her beauty (for it would take a good deal to do *that*), wounded her very *distinguée* nose, by the fact of a large gorse-prickle sticking exactly in the tip of it.

And she wounded my *feelings* by the fact that she declared it was my fault; and wouldn't allow me to come to the rescue by extracting that prickle! Moreover, I wounded hers by my laughter.

So we were all wounded together!

But this, like our luncheons amongst the rocks and the sea-pink, is a digression.

As we sit eating as voraciously as the cormorants which are diving for fish not far off, a pair of ringed plover are tippeting about, crying "Tluy-tluy;" and, our luncheon having disappeared, I walk off along the stony shore to find their eggs.

Sometimes one comes across them accidentally at once; another day one may search for a length of time before discovering them.

Ah! there they are on the sand, amongst the pebbles, by some tussocks of sea-grass—four, pale buff, very pointed at one end, and dotted over, especially on the larger part, with brown spots and little blotches. The pointed ends lie inwards, meeting one another.

They are evidently far on in incubation, for they are heavy and quite warm.

The pretty little plovers watch not far off, with their white breasts banded with black across the front, and their pale-brown backs, assimilating in a most beautiful manner with the stones amongst which they are standing.

There seems to be nothing in nature which has not its counterpart, so that, however brilliant a bird's plumage may be, it always finds surroundings on the ground or amongst the trees which will assist in concealing it from view.

The male golden oriole, for instance, a bird of brilliant yellow and black plumage, can become almost invisible in an oak tree, where the sunlight strikes down through the foliage, causing bright yellow lights on the leaves and also deep shadows.

And birds are supplied with plumage not only to shield them from others that prey upon them, but these again in their turn are coloured in such a way that they may be unobserved by birds on which they wish to prey.

The ger-falcon and the snowy owl are instances. For they live a great deal in regions where there is much snow, but their white plumage renders them invisible to the ptarmigan and willow grouse on which they feed, and whose feathers are also white in winter to conceal them. But the raven, on whom no other bird preys, and who is content to devour carrion, although he may have his residence in similar regions, needs not a protective plumage, and is satisfied with a colouring of boldest black. Yet he, too, amongst the clefts and shadows of the rocks, can render himself a by no means striking object.

So also with certain brilliantly plumaged birds in tropical countries, there is in the trees in which they pass so much of their time, either foliage, flowers, or fruits of a similar colouring with themselves, which aid in deceiving the eye, especially, of course, when they are not moving.

It is extraordinary how indiscernible a deer-stalker or a gillie can be amongst the boulders and heather of the Scotch hills, when dressed in a suit to some extent resembling the surrounding ground. A seal, also, lying upon a rock amongst the waves, until it moves, might well be a portion of the rock itself.

Gulls perhaps do not need to conceal themselves, but their young require protection.

Consequently, the parent birds gradually assume a conspicuous plumage of white and grey, or white and black for the most part, whilst the young are so mottled and splashed with dull greys and browns of various shades, that they are extremely difficult to distinguish, especially when newly hatched and in the fluffy stage.

Yet even the old gulls assimilate wonderfully with strong lights upon cliffs and snowy crests of waves at sea.

Lights and shadows on the plumage of birds have much to do with this power of concealment. Amongst insects, of course, it is equally marvellous, especially in the case of those that are distinctly an imitation of a bird's dropping.

In this there is a quaint irony.

Let us now sail away to an island which, in the western seas that wash against England's shores, lies away where the Atlantic rollers often hurl themselves

angrily against the rocks. In no part do its surf-beaten shores attain to any great height, although at one end the land rises with giant boulders and formation of rocks, to an extent that they are not ignored by the peregrine falcons as a nesting-place.

But for the most part the ground is not much raised above the ocean's level, and the loamy soil is carpeted with coarse grass, sea-pink in sheets of pale rose-colour, and bracken. Against the brilliancy of the really blue sea—the colour of which can vie with that of the Mediterranean—the thrift's pink has a marvellous and intensely lovely effect.

Here in May the amount of bird life is positively bewildering.

Putting aside the fact that there are countless thousands of puffins, the ground beneath your feet is thickly populated with Manx shearwaters (a big petrel), which are, to a great extent, nocturnal in their wanderings, and are now busy in their burrows, each pair incubating a snow-white egg with a beautifully polished surface.

In places, at almost every step you take, your feet sink with a sudden jerk into the soft dry soil, honeycombed close under the surface by the burrowings of the shearwaters and the puffins; and it is very trying for the poor birds, which often happen to be sitting immediately under the spot into which your foot plunges. There is a scrambling under your feet, and amidst an avalanche of pulverised peat and loam, a poor puffin looks indignantly out, his comical little yellow eyes half filled with dust.

To have the roof of one's house on one's head like that, and a great beetle-crusher into the bargain, must be most trying.

If you peep in amongst the crevices of the rocks where the puffins, and perhaps some guillemots also, are talking to each other in grunts, and guttural exclamations, which sound like "aw—aw—aw," you will see a comical "puff" with his head on one side, and his leery eye cocked at you, as much as to say, "Who on earth are you? I can't say I altogether admire you."

And if you put your hand down a hole, at the end of which a puffin is sitting, *doesn't* he let you know it?

His brilliantly-decorated summer bill has uncommonly sharp edges.

But the fun is to take a seat upon a soft tussock of thrift and watch the puffins' habits and manners.

All around you are their burrows, out of which, here and there, they toddle.

They are rather like little Japanese people. A big parrot-bill appears at the entrance, followed by the owner, in dapper black coat, white waistcoat, and scarlet shoes, looking very much like a little fussy old gentleman who is going out to dinner in London, and who can't get a cab. Mr. Puff runs out, looks round, thoroughly on the fuss, squints at you for a moment, and toddles indoors again.

One almost hears him muttering to himself as he goes—"I shall be late, I know I shall." Under such circumstances he rather reminds one of the White Rabbit in "Alice in Wonderland."

I expect Mr. and Mrs. Puff take turns in warming

Puffins.

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hat precious egg of theirs, which between them have managed to make in a rare mess; so that if, ı Mrs. Puff is out on the spree (or rather, the *sea*), does not return when she ought, it looked unnonly as if Mr. Puff, when he bustled out in the that I have just mentioned, was grumbling at her : of punctuality.

\nd if you've never seen a puffin, you can't ;ine how utterly comical he looks at such times.

: remember how we watched one bird in particular, se burrow was quite close to where we were having picnic luncheon, and if that bird bundled out once, ed round, and bundled in again, he did it at least a-dozen times.

\nd each time we were convinced his language r stronger and stronger.

Poor puff! we men can sympathise with him! know what these feminine delays are, when we , and we wait, whilst the ladies who went upstairs et on their hats, saying as they go—"We'll be n in a moment," are still apparently "titivating" quite half-an-hour has sped.

At last Mrs. Puff really did come back, and you ıld have seen the way in which the old gentleman ılled off.

He must have been in a rage, knowing that he dn't leave the egg to grow cold.

In the nesting seasons puffins are everywhere at :—floating in companies on the waves; diving :ath for small fry; squatting about on the rocks and bunches of thrift; in their burrows, busy with

incubation; and in addition to all this, hundreds and hundreds are constantly flying backwards and forwards, or circling round with small and quickly-beating pinions, their bright orange webbed feet straddled out on each side of their short tails making them look like mechanical toys.

The brightly-coloured horny sheath assumed over the bill proper, would seem to be an ornamental appendage for the breeding season.

The sheath is dropped with the autumnal moult, and also the blue warty skin above and below the eye, along with the yellow edging to the corners of the mouth.

Young puffins are most quaint little balls of dark grey fluff, with white underparts.

They are not unlike young chickens, such as those of the black Minorca, &c.

After a while they will toddle to the mouth of the burrows in which they are hatched, there to await the arrival of their parents with sprats and sand eels.

The old birds fly up from the sea with quite a row of small fish in their parrot-like bills—the silvery sand eels glittering in the sunshine. If one sails through a colony of puffins at sea, it is interesting to watch them as they swim away, turning their heads from one side to another to look at the approaching boat, and then with a sudden header disappearing below the waves, bobbing up serenely, some yards off, from below.

When the Manx shearwaters are abroad in the daytime, it is a striking sight to sail close to an innumerable company of what appear to be giant swifts.

Sooty black in colour, with white breasts, they glide with their long pointed pinions all but touching the surface of the waves as they go. With a few rapid strokes they then sail on with outstretched wings, as the whole company, of perhaps some hundreds, moves away towards its own particular island.

After a long May day of brilliant sunshine, when the setting sun is tinging the sea with a golden light, such a company of shearwaters have the effect of a great funereal procession: so black do they appear; so silently do they proceed.

In their burrows they can be heard "cukarooing," as the male and female sit together, keeping their white egg warm.

We came across one shearwater—an old maid, we imagined—that was solemnly sitting on an ancient and weather-beaten cork! We thought it kinder to throw it away, and to chuck her into the air, in order that she might take wing out to sea and find a husband.

Shearwaters are sometimes utterly helpless, in spite of their long wings, when pulled out of their holes; and if put down on the ground they will struggle off in the weakest manner, as if maimed or wounded. The truth is, their legs are so short and weak in comparison with their bodies, that they find much difficulty, when flurried, in rising on the wing; but if thrown by the hand, well up, they can then manage to keep themselves going sufficiently to get up full swing.

Sitting concealed amongst the rocks one day watching the sea-birds, a Manx shearwater fell sud-

denly in a fluttering wounded way from the air above, close to me.

Looking up, I saw a peregrine in the act of following his prey, when he caught sight of me, and swerved off.

That same day, too, I noticed in the distance a bird with an unfamiliar undulating flight. Marking it on a rock on which it settled, my delight was great when, on levelling my field-glasses at it, I discovered a hoopoe; evidently on its migration, perhaps to the mainland, there in all probability to be shot by some destructive land-lubber.

On this island, bare of all shrubs and trees, the bird was most conspicuous.

Here, too, there were wrens, meadow pipits, and rock pipits, whose nests I found.

In the centre of the island, where the bracken grows, was a large clamorous colony of lesser black-backed gulls; their pretty mottled brown eggs in twos and threes, all over the place.

Walking through this gullery, the birds rise up and wheel overhead, their snowy breasts, yellow bills, and dark grey wings set off against the blue of the sky.

"Meow-meow! Keaû, keaû," they cry, and settle down again, one after the other, as you walk away from their individual nests.

There are some herring-gulls amongst them, and two or three pairs of marauding greater black-backs. A few graceful little terns, lately arrived from more southerly climes, are skimming about, with a curiously buoyant and sculling flight.

Razorbill.

height of at least six feet two, removing heavy stones as if they were small pebbles.

Whilst he chucked some one way, the boatman rolled some another; and I, another.

At last, as a large stone was removed, my sister-in-law saw a small dark-coloured bird quickly sidling away to hide between those stones which formed the walls of the big hollow we had made. In her eagerness to look at the petrel she suddenly leant her head over the edge, and I, not seeing this, and equally eager, at that moment threw out a largish stone in the direction where a second before the coast was clear.

To my horror I heard a moan of pain, and looking quickly up, saw my poor sister-in-law sink back on the bank of thrift close by, with a long stream of blood trickling down her face from her forehead.

It was an awful moment!

Had I struck her temple and killed her?

It rushed through my mind that in my excitement I had been horribly careless in not looking to see where I was throwing the stones to.

And careless no doubt I was.

All the joy of discovering the stormy petrels, and the sunshine of a perfect spring day, died out.

Fortunately, with some brandy and fresh water at hand in the luncheon-basket, she soon recovered the faintness which had seized her, and was able to be steamed home across the waters at once.

But she had a poor bandaged head for some days. I remember with what kindliness she received a blow

which might have been a fatal one, and how she endeavoured to make the best of a nasty job.

Another day she laughingly returned to the scene of the disaster, nothing daunted.

A British heart is not easily cowed, even when the body is wounded!

So we set to work again, and with due caution in removing the stones, were rewarded by finding not only several stormy petrels, but also eggs. The whole of the long stretch of rocky bank was evidently full of them.

They, like so many sea-birds, only lay one egg, which, when the yoke is within the shell, is of a delicate whitish pink, owing to the thinness of the shell. When blown it is quite white.

At the rounder end of the egg there is usually a zone of minutest spots of dull reddish brown, which in some instances is merely a light powdering. One is able to remove the little petrels from under the stones, when they immediately open their bills to eject, with a spurt, quite a quantity of rich brownish oily matter.

When you open your hand and let the little fellows go, they flit away with an uneven flight, jerking first in one direction and then another, until they gain the element on which they are most at home, when they move away rapidly close over the surface of the waves, their white tail-coverts showing conspicuously.

They have the slenderest little black legs, with tiny webbed feet.

The smallest of sea-birds.

[illegible] habit of paddling on the [illegible]
[illegible]dly, giving the idea that the[illegible]
[illegible]es, they derive their [illegible]
[illegible].

[illegible] the guillemots in their full [illegible]
[illegible] rocky and precipitous isla[illegible]
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[illegible]n away to effect a l[illegible]
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[illegible]les somewhat roughly up[illegible]
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[illegible]y, and, as the swell lifts the[illegible]
[illegible] that boulder, step out, [illegible]
[illegible] you do so.

[illegible]tainly very whi[illegible]
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[illegible]les the slope, which [illegible]
[illegible] large crevices, there is a [illegible]
[illegible]. The nests, which for the m[illegible]
[illegible] young ones, with a sprink[illegible]
[illegible] great numbers of [illegible]
[illegible] about, absolutely putrid under the [illegible]
[illegible] of wrasse, some of which have been
[illegible] undigested and ejected.

There may be a fish quite lately c[illegible], a
the cormorants, disturbed by our arrival, [illegible]
time to give their children.

Walking amongst the nests, and h[illegible]
for the stench is abominable, the young [illegible]
up their ugly bodies, distending their [illegible]
[illegible]king wheezily.

Razorbill.

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Some take wild headers down the face of the ›cks, floundering about and trying to flap their half-rown pinions; either taking refuge in some cavity eneath the stones or gaining the sea, where they vim away to try and join the old birds, who have ›llected together on the water and are watching us. oung cormorants are certainly extremely awkward ıd ugly, with their soot-coloured bodies and huge ›layed web-feet.

But out at sea they are picturesque-looking birds, here they are collected on some group of boulders ver which the waves are dashing.

Here they sit, extending their wings to dry in the sun.

On all sides, after our landing is effected, hundreds f razor-bills and guillemots fly heavily off the rocks, king, as they go, a downward course, until they are pplied with an impetus sufficient to carry them out to a, from which they sometimes return in their flight, ıd circle round with their small wings quickly beating.

There is a long ledge deeply and narrowly indented ıder huge stones, where a lot of guillemots have laid eir eggs.

Clambering up to this with difficulty, I find the rds still there, as if they flattered themselves they uldn't be got at; and as I look over the ledge, and to the fissure, they all begin sidling away to an ›ening at one end, through which they shuffle and ramble one after the other, leaving a long row of eat pear-shaped eggs, some of which are a beautiful rquoise blue, blotched over with deep brown at the ickest end.

Others are creamy white, covered with Egyptian-looking hieroglyphics, whilst others are sea-green or pale brown, all more or less blotched and scribbled over with black and deep brown lines and spots.

These eggs are extremely thick in the shell, as well they may be, considering they are laid on the bare and rough surface of the rock.

I expect that if a guillemot begins by laying a blue egg, she continues to do so each successive year; and so also with eggs of other tints and colours.

Speaking of eggs, it would seem as if puffins had not always laid theirs under the ground, for though white to the chief extent, they are faintly blotched with big grey spots, which, when the empty egg-shell is held up to the light, show very clearly and in greater quantities.

Probably, therefore, the ancestors of the puffins originally laid their eggs, like razor-bills and guillemots, more or less in the open air. Now that they do so no longer, the need of colours and spots has departed, as protective marks. Maybe that in centuries to come their eggs, if the puffins continue their present habits in nesting, will be like the Manx shearwaters, pure white. These sea-birds must, I fancy, be very long-lived, otherwise how could they manage to maintain the countless numbers in which they gather year after year at their favourite nesting-places?

For in the case of guillemots, razor-bills, and puffins, as instances, only one egg is laid.

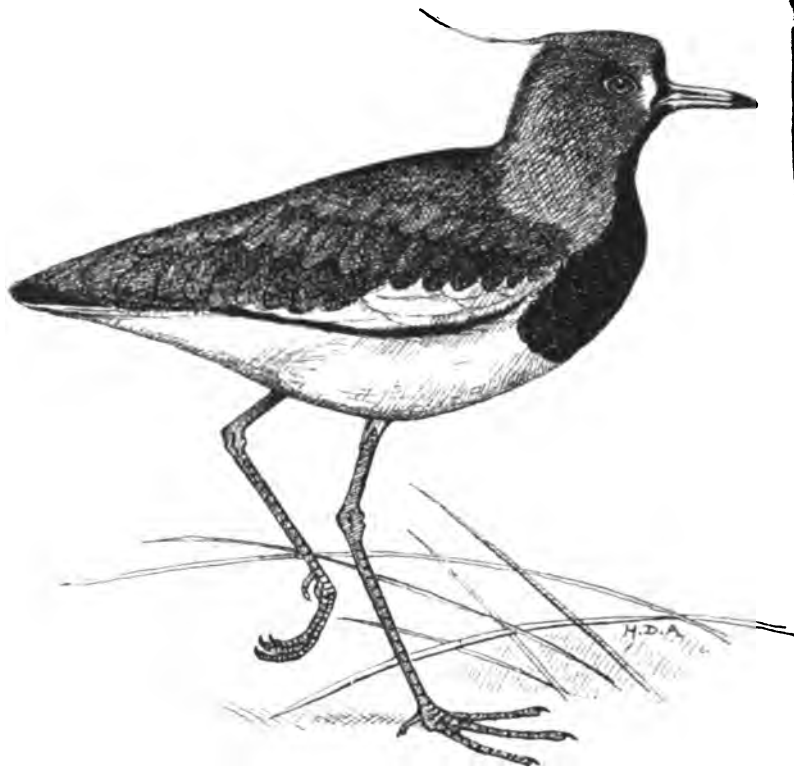
They *look* like birds that might be any age; in fact,

I am convinced that if one could hold a conversation with some of these leery-eyed old puffins, that grunt in their holes, one could hear many an interesting and exciting tale about Trafalgar, or even the Spanish Armada in the days of Queen Bess! But it is time to steam home again, carrying with us a few specimens of eggs—by no means collected wantonly or in a spirit of thoughtless destruction.

So we clamber aboard once more; our giant skipper calls to the man at the engine, "Go ahead, Peter," and we puff away, leaving the sea-birds once more in peace, and feeling that we have had no right to trespass and purloin on land that seems essentially *their* property. For have they not owned it, by inheritance, from generation to generation?

As we reach our destination the cry rings out, "Stop her, Peter"—the sun is sinking like a huge golden lamp on the horizon of the western sea, and we, more than ready for our dinner, tramp home over the sand and up the road which leads to the house.

With difficulty we keep awake when our dinner is over; but attempting to do so by means of a game of "Piquet," find even that to be unavailing, and whilst waiting for my partner to declare his elder hand, hear that the only announcement he can give vent to is a snore.



SPUR-WINGED PLOVER

CHAPTER XI

SEA AND SHORE BIRDS IN CAPTIVITY

> "That is the main definition of a great many birds—meant to eat all day, chiefly grubs or grain; not at all, unless under wintry and calamitous conditions, meant to fast painfully, or be in concern about their food."

ON an island, one of a group that springs up in the Atlantic off the west of England, I used often to sit on fine spring days and watch the sea-gulls busy with their nests.

It is an island that rises in the centre to a fair height, the whole of its sides being built up with rock, on which the boulders lie in picturesque confusion from almost the summit down into the sea itself, beneath which many are plunged, some showing themselves at low tide and affording resting-places for huge fawn-coloured seals.

All around, the water is so beautifully clear that when a seal is in sight, if you climb on to some rock whose sides cut down sheer into the sea, you can watch its movements as it dives below.

The way in which its long heavy body cuts through the water is splendid; giving one an insight into the strength of these animals and the swiftness of their gliding movements: so different to what they are on land, when all that velocity is changed into laboured floppings and waddlings, reminding one of a man attempting to move along when his arms and legs are tied, and he flat on his face.

At a little distance a floating seal with only his bullet head above water, has an uncanny resemblance to a man bathing.

Talking of seals reminds me of an amusing practical joke which, when staying in the islands already mentioned, I played upon one of my unfortunate guests.

Being a true Englishman—and they say an Englishman is never happy unless he is killing something—he was very anxious to add to his many other trophies in the way of stags' and chamois' heads, &c., one of a seal.

At least I fancy that would have been the end of the animal, had he succeeded in obtaining one.

Personally, I think it must be rather a nuisance never to see a wild bird or animal without wishing to slay it—a great nuisance for the bird or the animal, at any rate!

One is supposed not to be a sportsman unless one evinces an anxiety for killing; but I am not sure that one does not often get more sport out of *watching* wild creatures in their natural haunts, and quite as much pleasure as shooting them, if not more.

For instance, a naturalist's diary is surely a more interesting record than a game-book, which seems a good deal to aim at recording how many more partridges or pheasants you have been able to kill than your neighbours.

At any rate, here was a guest with a real love for knocking shot and bullets into various creatures; and so his great desire to shoot a seal must be gratified.

I did give him a fair chance before conceiving so mischievous a joke as I finally played him.

Two or three times expeditions were made, but somehow or other the seals never would come and take their siestas where they ought to have: it was too idiotic of them!

For instance, on a Tuesday, when a whole party of us were out together, chattering like magpies, in a steam-launch, if there weren't three seals, as big as hippopotomi, lying on a rock close by to which we steamed.

[Of course, all this time I am supposed to be

riting about sea and shore birds in captivity; but 'm not !]

Then on the Wednesday away would go our illing man, only to return at the completion of some ours, with a distressed and rather vexed look on is face.

"Would you believe it, the *brutes* weren't there."

Then on the Thursday, or perhaps that very same fternoon, out we all went again; of course without rifle, but with photographic cameras, luncheon askets, and plenty of puffing from our launch.

And there are the seals on the very same rock. Obstinate, *contrary* animals!

However, one day we really did come across ome when the rifle was in the boat. We had left he launch, and were rowing in the punt amongst lot of rocks to visit an outlying island, when sud-lenly, "Sh-h!—keep quiet, everybody."

There, on a rock close to us, lay stretched, with heir backs our way, two huge seals—an old, fawn-coloured one of about eight or nine feet long, and a maller darker one. The Slayer seized his rifle.

Some one sneezed!

I know he wished the culprit under the boat nstead of in it, rocked in the bosom of the sea! Everybody tried to whisper different directions, and everybody said "Sh-h!" in turns.

How we laughed afterwards!

We lost our heads and the seal his life, and then we lost the seal.

So, altogether, there was rather a muddle.

Well! the boat was steadied as far as was possible from being rocked by the swell, and *Bang!*

Everybody began yelling, and no one for a moment listened to what the other person said.

The big seal was shot!

With the blood pouring from the poor brute's side he managed to roll into the sea, where he lay floating; the waters dyed crimson around him.

"Shoot him again," said one boatman.

"No, no! get the boat up to him," said the other.

"Oh! poor beast," said I, as one felt that his jolly free, rollicking life was over.

"Give me another bullet," yelled the Slayer.

"Sit down; pray, sit down," shrieked the ladies.

"Quick! he's sinking," said another voice.

The great brute gave a heave.

The boat was urged up to him, but it was too late; with a sad look in his dying eyes, the seal sank under the blood-stained waters like—well! I was going to say "a sack of coals," but that sounds so unpoetical; I think I had better be more original than that, and say—like nothing I ever saw before, or, for the matter of that, ever want to see again.

Like Nanki-Poo in the "Mikado," I can't bear killing; and I never shall forget the day when I accidentally sat on a dormouse!

That was, at any rate, better than a certain don of a great University, who, having settled himself steadily on the sofa upon a comfortable-looking arrangement of cushions, arose with a horror-struck countenance,

saying guiltily to his wife, "My dear, I fear I've sat on our child!"

So that was the end of the baby—No! I mean the old fawn-coloured seal, and a very unsatisfactory end too.

Sometimes the sea gives back her dead, but she never did in this case, though experts declared she would.

And the disappointment of the Slayer was great! "It was something to have hit him," was his only means of comfort.

Now, in the entrance-hall of the house in which we were for a time staying, there were several old seal-skins spread about on the stone flooring; and, walking over the largest of these a few days after this seal hunt, it suddenly occurred to me that I would give the Slayer a grand stalk, with plenty of excitement to himself, and no harm to the seals.

So I surreptitiously removed that big skin to a play-room in the garden, fetched a bundle of straw from the stables, and a bodkin with a ball of string from the house, and proceeded to stuff that seal skin.

Luckily a seal has no legs, and a shape which, with a little punching about after the skin has been sewn together and duly stuffed, will enable one to make a very good imitation of a live one.

Taking the skipper of the boats into my confidence, I instructed him, when we were all away from home, to carry that seal down to the sea, and, hoisting him into one of the punts, place him on a rock in view of the house when the tide was ebbing.

After five o'clock tea, when we were all to be back from one of our daily expeditions, the skipper was to

come rather excitedly, but quite solemnly, to inform the Slayer that a fine big seal was lying on a particular rock, and might *possibly* lie there until he was shot.

It was more than probable that it would continue to do so even afterwards!

All the house party were informed of the nature of the beast, except, of course, the Slayer.

Then came the message.

"A fine seal on a rock not far from the shore, and —with the glasses—in view of the house."

Fearful excitement, by no means feigned on *any* one's part, for all are bursting with curiosity to know how the seal-stalking will end.

I, arch-hypocrite, standing on the terrace by the Slayer's side, who is awaiting the coming of his rifle, look through a telescope and say mournfully, as if fearful of breaking such bad news, that for my part the supposed seal only looks like a lump of seaweed. And I can bear being told by the Slayer, somewhat flatly and in an unvarnished kind of way, that I am an idiot, for I think to myself that those who laugh may win, or is it "those who win may laugh"?

At present my laugh is up my sleeve; it will come out later on.

"*Sea*weed! any fool can see it's a seal."

I retort, that not being a fool, is no doubt the reason why I haven't made that discovery!

But these compliments from the Slayer come to an abrupt end by the fact of his rifle being handed to him; and, accompanied by his brother, who winks back at the rest of us, away he goes for the shore and the punt.

As soon as we see by our glasses that they are safely embarked, we all make for the rocks in order to obtain a nearer view of this wonderful "stalk."

The sun is nearly setting, and its rays glint on the old seal, who is now nothing but skin and straw, but who once lay in just such a manner in real life. There is something rather pathetic in that thought. Slowly the punt is rowed towards a group of rocks about fifty yards away from where it lies. When these are reached there is a long pause and much mysterious fidgeting.

The Slayer jumps overboard up to his knees in water, and stooping down slinks to the shelter at hand. His brother follows.

Then the latter turns back to the boat, where he seems to stay for an age.

It turned out afterwards that the telescope, which had been taken, had been purposely left by him in the punt, much to the Slayer's annoyance, who turned indignantly to his brother with, "You're a nice sort of fellow to come out seal-stalking, *you* are."

So the telescope has to be fetched, and the delay in doing so is caused by the cunning idea of unscrewing it, and removing an inner lens, which would effectually prevent the seal being viewed through it, when immediate detection of the fraud would have been the result. With more grumblings caused by this unwarrantable delay, the Slayer levels the glass, only to exclaim that he can see nothing through it.

So he must take his chance, and shoot where he thinks the animal's head, or heart, is.

The truth was that it *was* a little difficult to make out its head, seeing that it hadn't one! and its heart was straw!

Then from the shore we heard the report of the rifle, followed by shrieks of laughter from us all.

Of course the trick is discovered!

Yet the Slayer still kneels cautiously in concealment behind his rock.

When to our intense satisfaction—Bang! If he hasn't fired again!

With a splash and a scramble he is into the punt—head foremost, apparently; and is at once rowed towards what he imagines to be his dead trophy.

But when the boat is about twenty yards from the seal, we can make out that the trick is discovered at last.

An amusing part of the whole thing was, that, although a very good rifle-shot, the Slayer, owing to his intense excitement, had never hit the target at all!

Perhaps the best part of it all, was the kindly way in which he bore all this fooling at his expense, and laughed as heartily about it as any one.

On the following day he had to leave us, and the report flew about that his departure was owing to the fact that he couldn't stand the "chaff" that he was subjected to.

Personally, I never saw any one stand such fooling better.

* * * * *

Now we must return to our island to look at the gulls. All along the south side there are numerous

nests by the middle of May, with their complement of eggs, some of which are not far off hatching. Here there is a mixed colony of lesser black-backed and herring gulls, and on the summit of the island are three or four isolated nests of great black-backs.

Some very noisy oyster-catchers show us that they also have eggs, and if you go carefully along a little above the high-tide mark, and know what sort of spot to look in, you'll find them.

Look ! there *is* a nest, just amongst the big pebbles of the sand bank ! merely a slight hollowing, and a few bits of shell and sea-weed gathered round the edge. So little, as not to be really noticeable.

The eggs are amongst the prettiest of the waders', rounder in shape than the plovers', and of a pale fawn colour, dotted about with very clear and rather small brown spots.

How often have I revisited the oyster-catchers' nests, and how often have I found the whole clutch of eggs stolen.

Nest after nest was treated like this, much to my regret.

I was anxious to rear up some young gulls, and having found a nest or two in which the eggs were chipping, returned the following day.

The egg-shells were there, but no baby gulls to be seen.

At that moment an old herring gull nearly knocked my cap off as she swooped at me, so that I knew the young ones were there somewhere.

Carefully scrutinising the surrounding ground,

which is entirely rocky and full of little crevices, my eyes suddenly realise that one of these newly-hatched babies is actually close to my feet, but, with a few greyish stones scattered about, looking so exactly like them that I had passed it over.

Warned by the parent birds, it is crouching down, and keeping absolutely still.

Directly I take it in my hand it begins to struggle and cry, knowing that all further deception is useless.

A pretty little fellow, with his grey fluffy body, relieved by darker spots and stripes about the head. His two brothers were close by, wedged into crannies in the rock.

Putting them into a basket, I clamber up to the plateau, on the island's top, to try and obtain some greater black-back babies.

Here the view is *quite* lovely: the panorama of the islands all round; the sea as smooth as glass, and of a brilliant blue, varied with purple and green patches of colour.

The foxgloves are in blossom, and against the deep colour of the water below, give a glorious combination.

Not a breath of wind, and the rocks are hot under the sun's rays.

The varied cries of the sea-birds, some close at hand, some in the farther distance, are the only sounds, except for the singing of the linnets in the gorse and the swish-swish of the waves on the shore.

In such a spot dull care has gone, and exhilaration of mind and body is all one feels.

From a neighbouring island there rings across the

intervening waters the mellow notes of a cuckoo. Once more I visit the nests of the great black-back gulls, which are sailing overhead, uttering hoarse but pleasing cries, for their calls fit in perfectly with the whole scene.

In one of the nests the young ones are hatched, and one tiny fellow is not yet dry; so recently has he come into the world.

And so my basket contains three more baby gulls. As soon as I have them at home they lose all fear when out of reach of the warning cries of the old birds, and devour small pieces of mackerel greedily.

They have spacious maws for their size; and they grow apace.

Besides them I have two young cormorants, and a couple of baby "puffs."

But the little black "puffs," although they thrive for about a week, collapse; which is sad.

Oyster-catchers, if you can get them on the shore when they are half grown, but still unable to fly, are quite easy to rear up on worms and small pieces of meat or fish, and look extremely pretty on a lawn, as they trip along, piping, and prodding for worms.

In a mild winter, where they have plenty of space, they will manage to feed themselves entirely, and keep in good health.

They like a large shallow dish to bathe and paddle in, unless there is a stream in the garden, where they can run into the water where not too deep.

It is interesting to watch the change of plumage in the gulls.

At first, greater and lesser black-backs, as well as herring gulls, are of a mottled brown, their bills dark horn-colour, and their legs and feet grey. In the second autumnal moult a large sprinkling of white feathers appear on the back in the case of the herrings, and dark grey in that of the black-backs.

In the third autumn the adult plumage is almost entirely assumed; and in the following spring, the fourth, my birds seemed to have their full plumage.

Perhaps their bills do not attain the height of the bright yellow colouring with the orange spot, until a little later.

The length of time that these gulls take in assuming their full plumage, probably is a sign that they are very long-lived birds.

One herring gull that I had was a real tyrant; and, especially during the breeding season, would run at people with outstretched wings, mewing in a weird and defiant way.

Woe betide your legs if he pinched you on the calf!

After several vicious pecks, he would throw his head back, and scream "Cah, cah, cah, cah," with widely-opened throat.

One spring he busily collected sticks and leaves, of which he made a nest on the verge of a fountain in the garden, where he would sit solemnly for hours at a time.

"Snub," a very sporting black pug, was one morning sniffing about not far off, with his back to the old gull, quite innocent of any danger.

The gull rose from his nest, took one quick run, nd to poor Snub's horror, seized him viciously by his urly tail. There was one shriek of fright, and pain, oo, I should think, from poor Puggins, and another of victory from the gull, who walked solemnly back with a wicked expression in his yellow eye, which plainly said—" Had you *that* time, my friend "—and then sat down again on his nest.

He grew tired of that one, and went farther afield into the park, where he built another at the foot of a tree trunk, and pecked boldly at the heels of the Jersey cows if they wandered too near him.

When he moulted he used to fly about, for unlike my other gulls, he wasn't pinioned ; so that when the old cut quills of his wings fell out, he was able of course to grow new ones.

And very pretty it was to see him flying round, much to the envy of his *confrères*. They had been pinioned when they were quite babies, which only meant the removal of a small piece of gristle on one wing.

A very slight operation, causing no inconvenience five minutes after it was performed. I can hardly believe that the splendid great black-back gulls that I now have in their adult plumage, were once the small fluffy babies that I took from their nest when a few hours old.

The poor old herring gull met his match, and his fate too.

To my sorrow I found him one day lying dead in the Park, with a big hole prodded in his back, stiletto-like.

One of my Australian cranes was the murderer.

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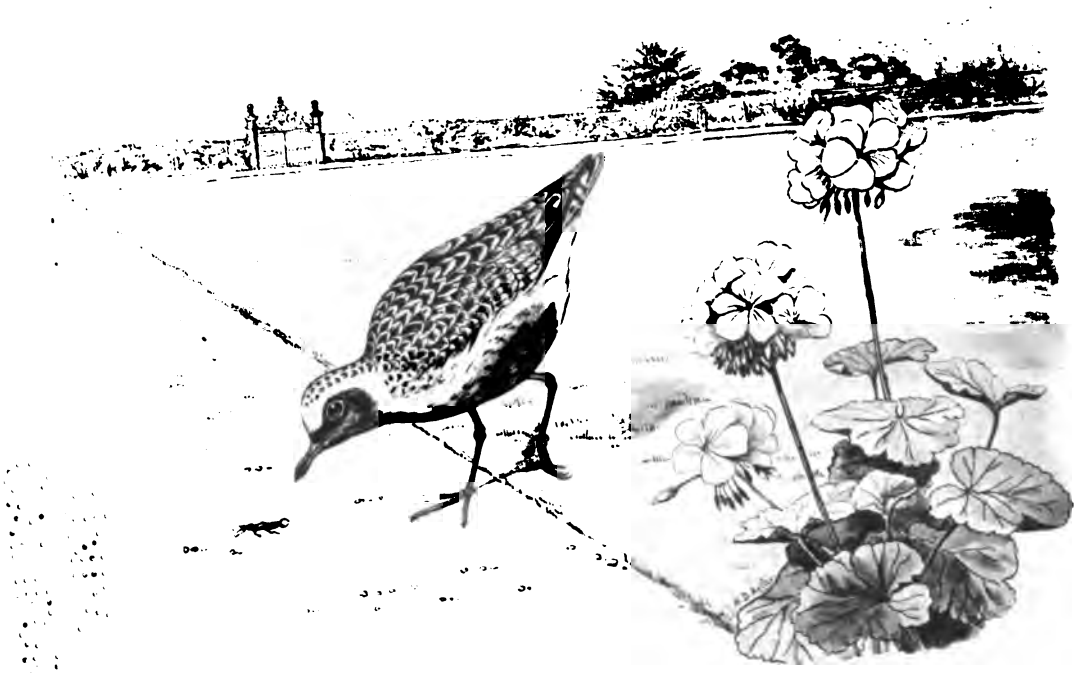
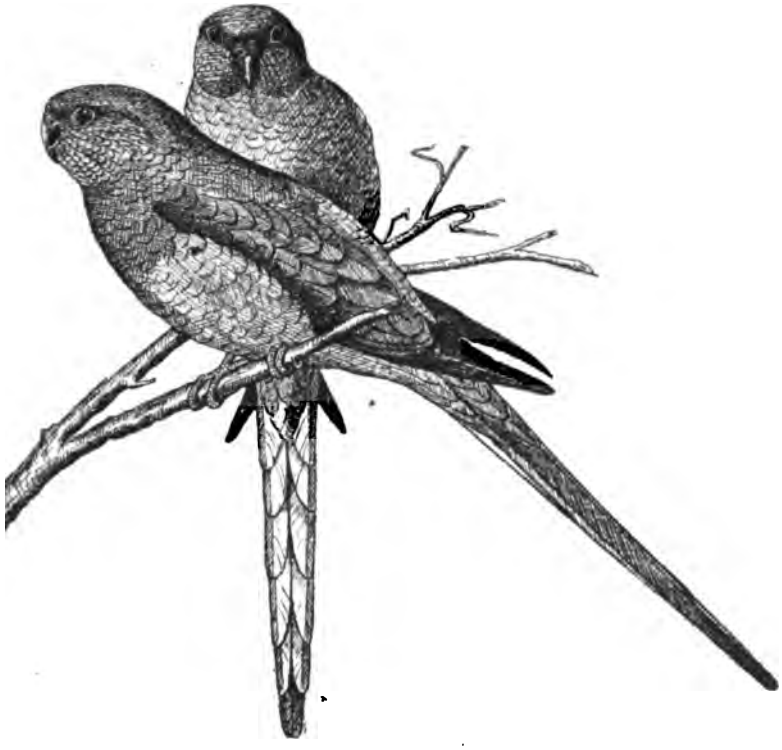


Grey Plover.



RED RUMP PARAKEETS

CHAPTER XII

PARROTS AND PARAKEETS

"That it only clutches with its claws, and does not snatch or strike with them;—that it helps itself about with its beak on branches or bars of cage . . . are by no means the most vital matters about the bird."

T is impossible to write in one chapter in any real detail on the numerous members of such a beautiful family of birds as the parrots and ·akeets, as well as of the branches of the chief ıily, such as the lories.

There are about eighty genera, containing some five hundred species.

The lories alone can fill a large volume, as any one who has seen or possesses Mr. Mivart's monograph with the beautiful coloured plates by Mr. Keulemans, very well knows.

Parrots have probably, amongst birds, been kept as cage pets as early as any other kind, and every one is familiar with the old grey Polly with the red tail, from the frequenter of the gin palace to that of the royal one.

One sees them sometimes in cottages, where some proud mother standing over her wash-tub tells you of her sailor son, and shows you her parrot as the present he brought her home the last time he set foot on the shores of old England.

Polly figures, too, in the best-parlour window of some neatly-kept suburban villa; her whistling and talking issues from the inmost recesses of the landlord's kitchen in a country village "pub"; whilst up at the big house on the hill she again finds a welcome and a cage that is suitable to her surroundings, in the spacious hall of the old manor.

Drive down the Mile End Road past the People's Palace: still Polly is to the fore, not perhaps in such opulent surroundings, either with regard to herself or her owner; but still there she is, suiting herself to those about her, and realising that if she lives in Rome she had better do as the Romans do!

The consequence of which is, her language is not always of the choicest; and if by chance she finds her

way to a West End drawing-room, she more often than not has to be hurriedly disposed of—at least, it speaks badly for her purchasers if she isn't.

There are many anecdotes about parrots; but one that was once told me struck me as good, though rather calculated to shock.

A dean's wife—why do disreputable parrots always belong to ecclesiastics and their wives?—complained to the bishop's wife, who also owned a parrot, that her bird used such shocking language; whereupon the bishop's lady generously offered to lend hers, in order to assist the deanery bird to become more refined in its conversation, and enlarged upon its charming and correct vocabulary. The following day the dean's wife, hearing that the episcopal parrot had arrived on its mission to convert its heathen brother, entered the dining-room where the cages had been placed side by side.

"Go to the devil!" shrieked her parrot. "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord," solemnly said the parrot of the palace!

A dear old grey parrot that I have had for twenty years and more—she was twenty years old when I purchased her—is one of the clearest enunciators I ever came across.

There is no mistaking what she says, and her sentences are appropriately strung together and introduced.

Always at five o'clock tea, but never at any other time of the day, she calls emphatically for "Bread and butter," but she says "Br-r-read."

On one occasion she fitted two separate sayings together in a mysteriously appropriate way. She often called "John;" to me, an unknown person; and a favourite exclamation was, "You ugly brute!"

One day a new footman arrived, whose name was John.

For the first time in his fresh situation he brought in the tea-tray with its complement of cups, saucers, &c.

As he steered shyly and gingerly through the elaborate maze of chairs and small tables which distinguishes the modern method of drawing-room arrangement, Polly for the first time in her life connected these two sayings together. A loud and masterful voice from behind a screen, close to which the footman was passing, exclaimed, "*John!* you ugly br-r-rute!" John recovered the shock, but for one moment there was every prospect of the tea-tray and its contents being hurriedly deposited on the floor.

For the time being he must have thought that some inmate of the house was slightly off his head, with a particular craze for devouring bread and butter, for the parrot had immediately added, "Bread and but." This bird's favourite sentence is, "How are you off for soap, my dear?" each word pronounced with astonishing clearness, in a very pompous and masculine voice.

"Do you see any green in my *eye?*" was a question he used to put to visitors; and he frequently placed our feelings on the rack by calling insinuatingly, "Puff, Puff, Puff; *poor* old Puff; *come* along!"

Now as Puff, a very favourite black poodle, had been underground for about six years, it really was rather trying, and Polly knew it; therefore he emphasised the fact, with a sly and mischievous gleam in his straw-coloured eye.

That poor dog! He was as clever as Polly in his way, and when he was the wrong side of the door, instead of scratching the varnish of a good mahogany, as a vulgar and ill-mannered dog would do, he stood sideways and thumped on the panels with his tail.

Necessity was the mother of invention, for he had been told so very severely, by a decidedly Spartan-minded mistress, not to scratch.

With regards his body, this order didn't seem to apply. I suppose he thought he might, at any rate, do what he liked in that direction, for scratch he certainly did. There never *was* such a dog for scratching; it was evidently irresistible.

Then, too, when one night on retiring to roost—I can't help saying "roost," since I am supposed to be writing on birds—he found that his rug was not spread in the usual place in a corner of the room; after repeatedly being told to lie down, but refusing to do so, he at last jammed his woolly head under a chest of drawers where his rug was stowed during the day, dragged it out in his mouth, and proceeded to claw it into bed-shape with his paws. Then, and not till then, did he curl himself up with a contented sigh.

After that it was a nightly trick, to the amusement of visitors, as with bedroom candle in hand they came in to their hostess's room to see the performance.

And before I end about Puff, I must just mention Puff's end.

He was run over by a carriage, which accident paralysed his hind-quarters, so that he had very little control over them. The consequence was, when his mistress was airing him in the village, much to the astonishment of the inhabitants, Puff would suddenly kick his hind legs high in the air, not infrequently turning a somersault (as a little girl of my acquaintance, during her Sunday questions, accused Lot's wife of doing), and the parishioners stared at Puff, and thought, "What a *tricky* dog, to be sure."

At last things grew so bad that no one quite knew which was Puff's tail or head, he got so mixed up; certainly his expression of face went to show that he didn't always know himself; so he was "planted" in the dogs' cemetery; and every one, including the parrot, said "Poor old Puff," but the parrot has said so ever since, and will insist on asking him how he is off for soap.

Happy thought! Surely Messrs. Pears, or Monkey Brand, or Sunlight, would give me a small fortune for Polly!

Hundreds of grey parrots are imported every year from Africa, when they are almost nestlings, and hundreds of them die in a very short time.

It is almost useless to buy one of these unacclimatised birds; their price sounds cheap and tempting, when in reality it is cheap and nasty, for to find your grey parrot on his back with his toes curled up, is very nasty and disappointing.

It is much better to give a bigger price for a ıger-tame bird, the colour of whose eyes prove him ı be more than a nestling.

Quite young grey parrots have dark grey eyes, lult birds have pale yellow ones.

I have known people give ten shillings or twelve ıillings time after time for these newly-imported arrots, only to lose each one, when a £5 note, already ɔent in driblets, would have been better laid down in lump.

Certainly, taking it all round, the grey parrot is ıe most clever talker, although some of the green .mazons, as individuals, are wonderfully talented, ;pecially perhaps the double-fronted Amazon, a very .rge green parrot with a primrose face and forehead ıd pale flesh-coloured bill. The Amazons are, in a ·ay, more comical than the greys, and when one does ng and laugh well, he would make the gravest person *nile*, at any rate.

There are several different kinds of Amazons, the ɔmmonest in England, as a cage bird, being the blue-·onted.

He is green, with a yellow face and a small patch f pale blue feathers on his forehead.

There are about twenty-four species of the Amazon ımily, one of the finest and best known being the olden-naped Amazon.

He is a large bird, as large as the double-fronted, reen in his general plumage, like the rest, but with bright yellow patch of feathers on the back of the eck.

One I know is most vicious to all but two or three people, but if any small bird or dormouse is placed in a cage when the parrot is about in a room, he waddles up, puts his head on one side, and makes ridiculous little coaxings under his breath, like a fond mother soothing a small baby.

Then there are the cockatoos of Australia; giant black ones as big as ravens, and the well-known snow-white ones with yellow crests. The leadbeater cockatoo is the handsomest of any, with his beautiful rose-flushed plumage, his brown eyes, and his lovely crest barred with pale pink, orange, and red.

A pair of these birds, almost the first that were imported, were given to my mother, and excited much admiration — in the sixties, I think—at the Crystal Palace bird show.

After keeping them many years, they were given to a lady in Norfolk, who had a splendid collection of different parrots and parakeets, and finally—as far as I know—they found a home at Sandringham, where they may be still.

But cockatoos are, as a rule, noisy pets, with their harsh wild screams which, unlike grey parrots, they never relinquish in captivity.

The smaller white cockatoos, both lemon and sulphur-crested, are very pretty, and become extremely tame.

But they, along with others of the parrot tribe, have their likes and dislikes, so that I was forced to part with a small lemon-crested cocky that used to fly about the garden, because if he *did* take a dislike to

people, he evinced it by swooping down on to their shoulders, and nipping the backs of their necks in a very harsh and painful manner.

Then, too, they are dreadfully destructive.

Amongst my numerous pets there was at one time a large white cockatoo which, like the smaller one, had its full liberty out of doors. The rose trees suffered as well as lots of others; but that was a trifle compared with indoor damage.

One afternoon when we came in to tea, the floor of the hall, under a large stained-glass window, was liberally sprinkled with fragments of the said glass.

We looked up.

Clinging to the leading outside was the shadowy form of a large bird, but poked through one of the many holes made in the window between an aperture of the lead was cocky's head, looking down with a triumphant expression in his eye at his work of destruction.

He had carefully picked at each framing of lead, and so let the glass fall out.

Exit cocky!

The roseate cockatoo, with a grey back and bright pink breast, is a handsome bird imported in large numbers; preferable, as a rule, in a large aviary, where with plenty of room and hollow logs, they might nest.

They are very hardy, as are most of their tribe, when acclimatised.

There is a curious but rare cockatoo called the gang-gang, the male of which species has a dark grey mottled body, with a brilliant scarlet head and crest; and this curls forward as if it had been crimped.

They are not very desirable cage birds, unless they have been reared from the nest, when they *can* be very gentle.

They rejoice in the title of *Callocephalon Galeatum*, but no one would want to ask for that in a bird shop, so that the everyday bird fancier need not trouble to commit it to memory.

It is a pity there are no pigmy cockatoos, for there is something extremely attractive in miniatures, which occur in certain tribes and families of birds.

Amongst the parrots there are the tiny hanging ones, and the pretty little love-birds of West Africa with their brilliant green bodies, bright orange faces, and stumpy tails barred with blue and red.

The peach-faced love-birds, or rose-faced—which is better—will breed in an aviary, but they are often spiteful to other inmates.

They are hardier than their orange-faced cousins, and slightly larger.

Then there is the family of conures, medium-sized parakeets with horrible shrill voices.

The golden one with green wings is very striking. Conures are generally ill-tempered to most people, but there are, of course, exceptions to every rule.

A family of small parrots usually noted for gentleness in captivity is that of pionus, of which there are six or seven known species, coming from South America.

The bronze-winged pionus is peculiarly coloured. Deep brown and blue blend together, producing a sombre yet rich effect, whilst a lovely cerise under the tail sets off the other parts.

When the wings are spread, the flight feathers are dark blue outside and a beautiful verdigris blue underneath.

They are very scarce birds as cage pets, and a specimen in full colour, such as swells the number of my ornithological family, is a decided rarity. He is not exactly an able-minded member of society, but he is most amiable, and gives vent to very few sounds that grate on the ear.

He will come on to one's hand directly it is put into his cage, and loves to be petted and made much of.

They don't talk, these pioni, but they are beggars to think.

I am not concerned with parrots I have never known much about, such as the big gaudy eclecti, the females of which family are red and the males green. Each sex is equally gorgeous in its own style of plumage, and no one at first sight would take them for the same kind of bird.

They are inhabitants of the Moluccas and the Solomon Archipelago.

It is in that quarter of the globe that all the gorgeous lories are found.

They are distinguished from other parrots by the peculiar brush on the tip of the tongue, which enables them to suck the honey from flowers.

None of the lories are larger than a turtle-dove, and some are no bigger than a sparrow; but greater or smaller, all vie with one another in the brilliancy and variety of their colouring, and, for the most part, in the ear-piercing shrieks which they utter.

Unlike others of their tribe, they can hop from one twig to another as well as climb, and when on the ground they proceed by a series of rapid hops.

A pair of lories together, such as the Australian blue mountain, the scaly lorikeet, Forsten's, &c., play together like two kittens, rolling over and over each other, puffing themselves out, fluttering their extended wings, hanging downwards from their perch, and performing a variety of entertaining gymnastics.

In spite of their extremely tropical appearance, and their native homes in New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific Ocean, some of the lories are extremely hardy, and will live in an unheated outdoor aviary all the year round, with only canary seed and a certain amount of green food and fruit as an addition or change in their diet. Forsten's lory is a gorgeous bird, with a rich green back, wings, and tail, a purple mask to his face, a yellow collar round his neck, and a flaming blood-red chemisette.

Gorgeous, but unsafe with other birds.

I kept a pair in an aviary on the Chiltern Hills, where the snow and the rain beat down, and no lory could have been in more brilliant plumage or finer condition in Sumbawa itself, the island of the South Seas from which these birds had come.

Indeed their condition was far healthier, and their feathers more sleek, than when they were caged within the house.

Like everything else, they prospered better in fresh air, and were not, like many human beings, afraid of it.

One kind of lory is a gorgeous azure blue, others are for the most part brilliant scarlet with yellow, blue, and green markings.

Flocks of the Blue Mountain lory inhabit the eucalyptus forests of Australia and Tasmania, moving with an arrow-like flight from tree to tree, where they extract the honey from the flowers.

They would be delightful cage pets if only their voices were more melodious, but their shrill cries and constant screamings are most trying.

Then there are the big nestor parrots of New Zealand. The kea, a fine bird with olive-green plumage, mingled with blue and yellow in the wings and tail, and scarlet underneath, has degenerated sadly; for it chases the sheep, gnaws a hole in their backs, and eats the kidney fat; so that it is killed down as much as possible, and will probably in time become extinct. A pity! for it is a handsome bird, and a decidedly pleasant cage pet.

But of all the parrot tribe, my favourites are the various kinds of Australian parakeets, many species of which used to be imported to England much more than they are now.

It is said that the reason for their rarity, as in the case of the pretty little turquoisine, is the fact that they have been driven much farther inland away from more civilised haunts, from several reasons.

Turquoisines used to be imported quite frequently; now they are barely obtainable.

Such lovely little fellows, with their rich green bodies, tails, and wings, the latter being adorned with a

dark red patch about the shoulders in the males, and their brilliant azure blue faces.

They breed readily in an aviary, and a baby turquoisine reared from the nest becomes a most charming pet.

One that I once had, used to sit on my shoulder, and in winter time would perch on the fender to spread out his wings and tail before the fire, as he would have done in the rays of the sun.

He had been taken from the nest in a London aviary, and brought up by hand, or rather by mouth, for the only way to feed baby parakeets is to masticate some biscuit—"Albert" is as good as any—and cram your nestling with the naturally warmed and moist food.

Parrots, like pigeons, disgorge their half-digested food from their crops into the mouths of the young birds.

It is not altogether an operation to be performed in public, but then I never can feed young birds in any way with successful neatness when people are watching me.

Left to myself, I am all right.

Turquoisines are not much larger than the well-known budgerigar, the little bright green parakeet with the scalloped upper plumage, so often seen in bird shops and with Italian women in the London streets.

After all, how true it is that familiarity breeds contempt.

If none of us had ever seen a budgerigar until yesterday, we should go wild with enthusiastic ad-

iiration, but we have become so used to it, that most eople think little of it. For all that, one always eeps a warm corner in one's bird affections for this)lly, cheery little fellow, with his swallow-like /arblings, his brilliant colouring, and his readiness) adapt himself to his surroundings and rear up a umerous progeny.

And now mankind is putting his mark on the little reen bird, so that he has in some instances become ale yellow all over—whereby he has decidedly eteriorated—and will possibly in time be blue as vell.

Nothing, however, will excel the natural colours nd design.

The female is easily distinguishable from the male)y the brown cere over her bill, which in her mate is)lue.

When a hen bird is going to nest, this cere)ecomes deeper in colour and rougher in texture.

The small black spots on the feathers of the face ire very quaint, and the whole outline of the bird is :xtremely elegant.

In a large aviary their flight is extraordinarily wift as they dart from one end to the other, screaming hrilly as they fly.

Any amount of them will sit together in a row, ach pair warbling to one another, and caressing.

There is another of the small grass parakeets of Australia, which is said to be numerous in the vicinity f the Swan River, but which is never, or very, very eldom, sent to England—the Earl of Derby parakeet,

a beautiful bird like a miniature roselle, which would probably be quite as hardy as turquoisines or budgerigars. And the "elegant," too, closely allied to the other grass parakeets, and readily nesting in captivity. Then there is the "splendid," a glorified turquoisine, with all that bird's bright colouring, and a magnificent crimson breast into the bargain.

Australia's birds are most lovely, and the flocks of various parakeets are amongst the most fascinating.

The paradise parakeet is a joy to behold, with his extremely graceful shape and intense beauty of plumage, a description of which is really worse than useless.

Only Gould's Birds of Australia can assist one to realise it.

I remember seeing cages full of "paradise" and "many-coloured" parakeets some fifteen or twenty years ago in the East London bird-dealers' shops, but alas! it is but a memory. A stray pair or two occasionally arrive, and command high prices; and one pines for some of these beauties, as well as for others still undiscovered in the wilds of their native land. Bourke's parakeet is another that I have longed for; a bird as large as a turquoisine, with delicate blue feathers set off by pale salmon pink.

The larger kinds are very showy in aviaries. The king parrot, as big as a dove, but looking larger on account of his long broadened tail.

He is a vivid scarlet on head and breast, and richest green on the back, whilst along the shoulders runs a line of emerald green; the wings and tail

being dark blue black. The queen, his mate, is slightly larger than he is, when fully grown; and where he is scarlet she is green.

To breed king parrots successfully, as indeed is the case with many others, it is best to give them an aviary to themselves, with some large hollow logs placed in various positions.

Perhaps the most showy of all the Australians is the blood-winged parakeet—somewhat smaller than the king—whose plumage is boldly divided in rich contrast of colouring.

The dazzling emerald green head and breast, the small coral red bill, the deep black-grey of the shoulders, the magnificent cardinal of the upper wing, and the broad green tail, with its upper coverts of brilliant blue, go to making up as fine a combination of colours as one could hope to see.

The hen is, for the most part, green in different shades; affording a pretty set off to her mate's more gaudy feathering.

These larger parakeets are much more frequently imported, frequenting as they do districts nearer the coast.

There are several more, such as rose hills (rosellas), mealy rosellas, pennants, barrabands, Port Lincolns, fiery parakeets, redrumps, &c.

I regret that owing to a necessary curtailment in the number of my sketches, I am unable to give any illustrations of them; but after all, when they are not done in colours, it is difficult to convey any real idea of their true beauty.

It seems a great pity that special aviaries for the hardy parrots and parakeets are not built at the London Zoological Gardens; for it is anything but encouraging to see these graceful and active birds cooped up in small cages in that deafening babel of screams and close atmosphere, in the parrot-house.

A Forsten's lorikeet—which I presented to the Society, and which with me lived in an outdoor aviary all the year, with no artificial heat, and looked the picture of health; with only seed for food, and greens in summer—I found in the vitiated air of the parrot-house, on a mild October day, with some very sloppy bread and milk in addition to its seed; looking as different in its condition as an East London child does to a country one.

Rows of cages jammed together, which in the winter time are dominated by an upper tier of raucous-voiced macaws, backed by lines of cockatoos and amazons shrieking against each other; while here and there a plaintive "*Poor* Cocky" makes itself heard, as much as to say, "Take me out of this; I'm not used to such language, and my head aches fearfully."

Mingled in with all these boisterous birds are tiny finches and delicate tanagers, as well as flashy-billed toucans and green hunting jays.

So much money has been expended upon reptile houses, &c., where room enough is given to some monstrous python to strike a miserable guinea-pig or a wretched trembling rabbit and then curl himself up in a blanket for a fortnight; yet these lovely birds are still refused the model dwellings they deserve and the

ampler space that they need. For the more delicate ones, an aviary within a glass-house, such as the monkey-house, with an ambulatory for visitors on three sides, would be an object of much interest, and flowers, palms, &c., could be grouped about. Here the tanagers, sun-birds, tiny finches, zosterops, and many others would be perfectly happy, and in the end far less trouble than when confined in fifty separate cages.

The tanagers are a large family of most brilliant plumage for the most part, and would under such conditions be exceedingly attractive.

The waders, ibises, and flamingoes enjoy the bountiful space of the eastern aviaries ; whilst many different doves, bower-birds, and what-not, move freely in the western ; but a need is felt for greater freedom in the case of those smaller and more delicate ones, along with the less quarrelsome parakeets—of Australia and New Zealand, *par excellence*.

There are two species from the latter country, now, like others, seldom imported, which make charming pets for cage and aviary. Both bear a close resemblance to each other, in size about that of a thrush, of a bright rich green in general colour : the one (the New Zealand parakeet, as it is called) having a stripe of bright cardinal red running across the eye from the bluish bill, and the same colour in a band round the middle of the back ; the other having a patch of that same red upon the forehead. They are extremely active in their movements, running very quickly about the cage, and hopping on the ground.

And they breed successfully in captivity.

Mr. Dutton, the Vicar of Bibury, a well-known authority on the parrot tribe, once sent me a young New Zealand parakeet, one of a brood of five that was hatched in his aviaries, and a more charming pet I never had.

It would sit on my hand and clamber with swift movements up my arm on to my shoulder, uttering its peculiar crowing cry.

There is another, closely allied to this species, with a golden front to its head.

They fly exceedingly swiftly, and they are hardy enough for an outdoor aviary in England.

Some of the macaws are well known, with their formidable bills and gaudy feathers. One is scarlet with yellow and blue in the wings and a blue tail.

Another is blue and yellow, and another a deep bright blue all over (the hyacinthine macaw), inhabiting Brazil.

Illiger's macaw is considerably smaller and very pretty.

I know of two or three owners of macaws who allow them to fly about the gardens. A fine sight they are.

At a country house in Yorkshire there is a splendid fellow who flies down from the trees directly the mid-day dinner-bell is rung, and presents himself at the door of the kitchen quite regularly.

When I went up the Nile in 1899 on a Dahabeah, I could not resist purchasing a fine red and blue macaw in Cairo at a native bird-dealer's.

He was a great attraction on our boat, his bright colours exactly matching the blue, red, and yellow awnings of the upper deck, where he used to sit on a perch.

The members of our crew would supply him, "Se Ra"[1] (as we named him), with pieces of mawkisk sugar cane, cutting alternately a piece for themselves and the macaw, who squeezed each morsel about in his huge beak, drinking the sap greedily and then dropping the fragment of pith on the deck, whilst his eyes glistened with dilating pupils at the prospects of some more.

At luncheon one day as we sailed merrily before a favourable wind, which was by no means always the case, a fearful commotion was heard outside the saloon in which we were feeding, followed by a loud splash in the river.

We all rushed to the windows, where we saw "Se Ra" floating with outstretched wings on the turbid waters, looking absolutely terrified as the strong current bore him swiftly away.

Following in his wake was one of our Arab crew, who had been the cause of the prodigious splash. Only his head appeared above the water, and as he passed along he gave us a look of triumphant and virtuous assuredness, which said, "Is it likely 'Se Ra' will perish when Mousri is there to save him."

Mousri was more brave than beautiful, for he was deeply pock-marked and squinted with the one eye that retained its sight, most excruciatingly. But he grasped the macaw, and landed him forlorn, and

[1] Pronounced "Say Rar."

dripping from the tip of his beak to the end of his tail, through the nearest window of the Dahabeah; Mousri as a reward receiving a nip from the bird, and a piece of silver from me.

On another occasion the macaw was all but drowned, but was again rescued by the undefeated Mousri.

That time "Se Ra" was almost insensible, and had to be held upside down for a pint of Nile water to escape from his interior!

That macaw has seen a good many sides of life. He and Mousri were great characters in their own peculiar ways.

The latter ever ready to proffer his aid to the helpless, as a sister-in-law of mine, who was with us, discovered when, on hesitating as to how she could clamber down the bank to the Dahabeah, after a ramble under the light of a brilliant moon, she found herself suddenly clasped tightly in Mousri's arms, and caught the gleam of his straying eye within an inch of her face.

Another moment and she was on the shore, Mousri looking triumphant and courtier-like, happy in feeling sure he had done absolutely the right thing at the right moment. The bewildered lady, in her best Arabic, murmured her thanks, but in her confusion said "Quaiss ketîr," which, being interpreted, means "Very nice"; at which Mousri was absolutely overjoyed!

To keep the parrot family in good health either indoors or out, cleanliness is essential, pure fresh water,

and for those in cages as much exercise as is possible under the circumstances.

Big parrots delight in coming out so that they may exercise their wings, and it is not a bad plan to train them to come on to a stick, which can then be waved gently up and down, so that the bird has to flap its wings in order to keep its balance.

With the larger parrots it is best in sunny weather to syringe them, so long as they are in robust health, unless an individual bird is successful in taking a bath for itself in a large pan; for parrots are naturally effective ablutioners, and the feathers of one that has a regular douche are very superior in gloss and colour to one who never knows that boon.

Baths and exercise will often prevent the rather incurable evil of feather eating, sometimes brought on by over-heating diet, and perhaps, too, by stuffy rooms, for which many folk have an inordinate affection, whereat evil microbes rejoice, and whereby they largely flourish.

In their natural state birds breathe in extremely cold air at nights, even in Africa, at certain times of the year.

The best seed should be given, including several sorts, and good mixtures can be bought both for the larger and the smaller species.

Parrots are very fond of fruit in season, and bananas and oranges can be given all through the winter as dessert.

The Australian parakeets love large bunches of flowering grasses—their natural food—which can be

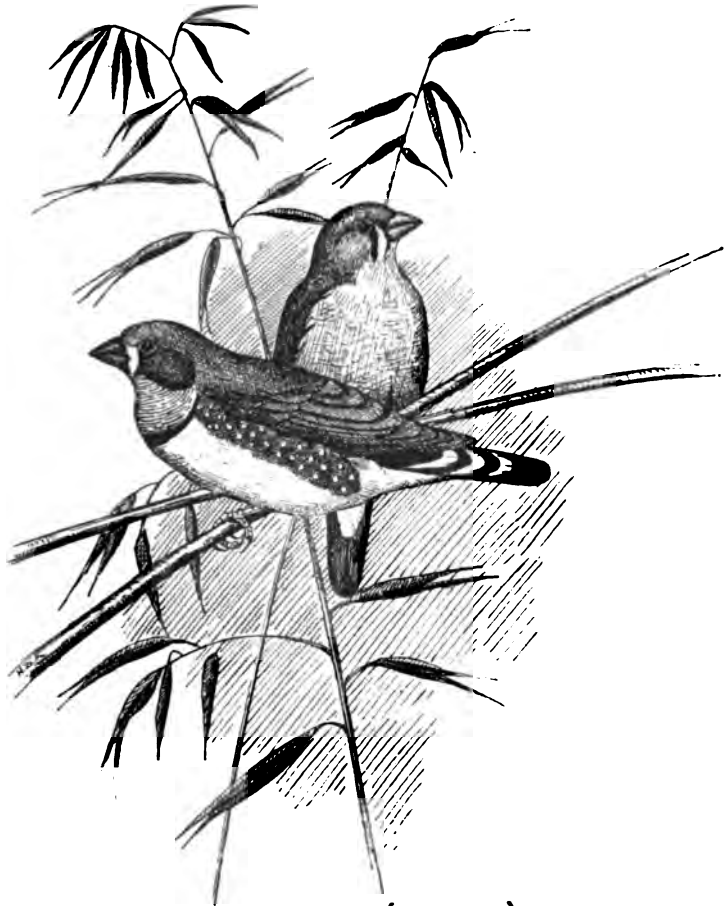
picked in the country from May or June until the autumn.

If the garden is a large one, a small plot can be set aside especially for aviary use. Chickweed and groundsell are pounced upon by every bird, and it is a pretty sight to see twenty or thirty brilliantly-coloured birds scrambling about for the especial salad that they love. The yellow of saffron finches, the scarlet of king parrots, the vivid emerald green of nimble budgerigars, the splendid crimson and violet of the pennants, the blood-red patches of the crimson-wings, the more sombre grey and white of the cockateels with their rouged cheeks on primrose heads, the lovely blue of the robins from America, who have especially darted down with plaintive notes after a mealworm, the flaring red of the Virginian nightingales—all these, and many others in a choice collection, form a picture of beauty which is ever a joy.

A saucer of fresh white bread, soaked in milk and squeezed out fairly dry, is much appreciated, and many parakeets will take mealworms with avidity.

Grey parrots, Amazons, macaws, and cockatoos are very fond of sweetened tea; neither does it seem to do them any harm, to judge by the condition of my forty-five year old grey—as I believe his age to be—who has always had a liberal drink of this sort at five o'clock.

That birds are always dying, like everything else, is true; but with attention to diet, with personal care to details, and common sense upon thoughtfulness, there is no necessity for their dying before their appointed time.



ZEBRA FINCHES (AUSTRALIAN)

CHAPTER XIII

MANAGEMENT OF CAGES AND AVIARIES

"Birds have not their town and country houses, — their villas in Italy, and shooting-boxes in Scotland. The country in which they build their nests is their proper home."

IT is often rather puzzling that even amongst people whose eyes for neatness and cleanliness are evidently keen, those qualities should apparently be king with regard to the state of bird cages, where

[illegible] and cared for. One sees bird cages in the [illegible] or sitting-rooms of the richer classes [illegible] in smartness that would never [illegible] be permitted elsewhere in the establishment, [illegible] house or garden.

[illegible] is completely important that [illegible] should not be splashed with remnants of [illegible] diet, that the perches should not be soiled [illegible] water should be scrupulously clean, or the [illegible] sweet and fresh. A bird must not be [illegible] in a room, or adjunct to the rest of [illegible] The cage must be placed where [illegible] will suit the inmate; not merely where [illegible] be out in the way or look most picturesque [illegible] the wants of our children and dogs [illegible] comparative decree, our birds. Fresh air [illegible] for their well being, but a draught [illegible] sometimes fatal. Housemaids, [illegible] women, are very apt when sweeping the [illegible] in the early morning to allow birds to be left [illegible] an open window and door on a cold [illegible] morning, when perhaps they have not food [illegible] in every glee—especially in the case of [illegible] birds—wherewith to maintain the warmth [illegible] of the body.

I have not found that the cages, except in case [illegible] illness, require covering over at night; indeed, [illegible] the old four-posters with the curtains drawn tight [illegible] and, they would necessarily keep out the fresh [illegible] and shut in the stale.

Pigmy Doves

the owners' rooms, persons, and general surroundings are *soigné* and cared for. One sees bird cages in the conservatories or sitting-rooms of the richer classes, in a state lacking in smartness that would never for a moment be permitted elsewhere in the establishment, either in the house or garden.

It does not always seem completely important that a cage should not be splashed with remnants of stale food and dirt, that the perches should not be soiled, that the water should be scrupulously clean, or the food perfectly sweet and fresh. A bird must not be a mere ornament in a room, an adjunct to the rest of the surroundings. The cage must be placed where the position will suit the inmate; not merely where it will be least in the way or look most picturesque. As we study the wants of our children and dogs, so also, in a comparative degree, our birds. Fresh air is important for their well-being, but a draught is hurtful, and sometimes fatal. Housemaids, unless strictly warned, are very apt when sweeping the rooms in the early morning to allow birds to be left exactly between an open window and door on a cold winter's morning, when perhaps they have no food left from overnight—especially in the case of insectivorous birds—wherewith to maintain the warmth of the body.

I have not found that the cages, except in cases of illness, require covering over at night; indeed, like the old four-posters with the curtains drawn tightly around, they would necessarily keep out the freshe air and shut in the stale.

To inhale one's own exhalations all the night long can be neither good for man, beast, or bird.

Besides which, the birds are often left with their cages covered until perhaps nine o'clock in the morning, so that in the artificial gloom they have been unable to break their fast.

During the long mid-winter nights I often place a candle near my birds up to ten o'clock, in order that they may, by feeding, strengthen themselves to better endure the long hours of darkness; for in the first place it grows darker within the house sooner than outside, and secondly, the birds that in hard weather perish in a wild state, do so far more from lack of food and water than on account of the intense cold, as is proved by the fact that well-fed aviary birds will be warbling merrily in the snow, when the wild ones the other side of the wire are humped and miserable.

It is food that warms the body; and birds, with their quickness of digestion, need a constant supply, especially the smaller kinds. Therefore the custom of covering over the cages with tightly-fitting green baize is exactly the opposite one to that which I have adopted for many years.

But common sense must be used.

Let me give an example.

A nightingale of mine—the one from whom my sketch was taken—developed a cold in January; ceased to sing, sneezed and gasped for breath. The influenza was rampant in the house at the time, and our doctor did not jeer when I suggested that the nightingale may

have caught it. On the contrary, he seemed to think it perfectly possible.

The poor little bird shivered, his eyes sunk into his head, and he barely ate a morsel.

As soon as he ceased his daily song I knew something was amiss, and immediately covered up all but the front of his cage—which is one of Indian split bamboo, open on all sides—and at night left a small lamp burning where no harm could come of it, so that the light fell just upon the food and water vessels.

In his drinking water I gave him a daily dose, made from a prescription taken from a very useful book on British birds by Wallace, in which various bird ailments are described, along with their cures.

In this instance I selected the medicine recommended for catarrh, and found it effectual.

The fact that the nightingale was able to eat and drink at any time of the long winter night no doubt helped his recovery considerably; and recover he did, regaining his health, with more vehement song than ever, so that by March, in spite of easterly winds of the most bitter description, he was almost too loud for one's sitting-room, when one wished to converse with friends and visitors.

I found another prescription from this same book most efficacious in a case of inflammation of the stomach in my rock thrush.

Parrish's chemical food is good to put in the water once or twice a week in winter time. But only experience will teach one how to treat birds, both ill and well; and only careful observance will show the

attention in details that is necessary for their health and happiness.

The state of the interior should be looked to by the outward signs thereof, deposited on the sand; if there is much diarrhœa, three or four drops of castor oil are beneficial so as to thoroughly purge out any poison in the system.

The bird must be taken in the left hand, and the bill opened with the fingers—handling birds is again only learnt by experience—whilst the oil on a clean quill pen is carefully dropped down the throat. This, if neatly done, will in no way smear the feathers round the beak.

Then the bird must be kept warm, and perhaps given some bread soaked in hot milk.

Constipation can be treated in the same way. It is most important that food should be perfectly fresh; yet many people feed their birds, especially those that eat "soft" food, as if they fed themselves in this manner.

Supposing your dinner was served up on one dirty plate, with fragments still on it of the previous day's meal, some of which is no longer exactly sweet, such as fish may be in hot weather; and supposing you partake of the present meal, with all that refuse mixed in! Is it not likely that you may before long have a decided pain in what is politely called your "tummy"?

Or if at five o'clock tea the milk and cream jugs were not washed out, and the fresh milk and cream had simply been poured into that of the previous day's supply!

It is after this fashion that I have seen birds fed.

A certain quantity of food is left over in the morning in the cage of a nightingale, a shama, or a blue thrush, enough to last with a little more added, and so the supply overlaps for some days.

It is like the butter to match the bread, and then the bread to fit the butter!

The economy of not wasting the supply is a very false one, for you waste your bird's constitution instead, and then you hear the complaint: "I shall give up keeping those insectivorous birds, they are always dying."

Make it a rule that the cage drawer is cleaned every morning, unless Sunday is excepted in the case of many cages; and that fresh sand—good gritty sand—is liberally sprinkled on, that each vessel is thoroughly scoured and as clean as you wish your own breakfast plate to be, that the food shall be sweet and the water pure. As to both of these, see that neither one nor the other is placed under any perch where the birds can mess into them.

It exasperates me to see people who have no eye for that which is an immediate eyesore. These sort of things can quite well be avoided, and when they happen must imply that the bird keeper has not really a love for birds. Imagine making a poor bird, who in a wild state would always obtain the purest water—in the case of a blue thrush the clear running water of a mountain rill—drink that which is contaminated by that which when dropped on the sand is perfectly cleanly and of no offence to the laws of

sanitation. Yet I have seen the water in the drinking vessels in a most filthy state, even in ladies' drawing-rooms and conservatories, simply because the dear ladies *will* not use their eyes and their brains, or consider that birds are, as a rule, the very cleanliest of God's creatures; why, then, treat them as if they were Boers, who prefer to have things dirty and to go unwashed?

By-the-bye, don't forget the bath, which should always be hung on to the cage door, and not placed inside, because then the sand is wetted so much more, and the cage messed about.

Perches should be kept clean and sweet, for oftentimes they are to be seen soiled with dirt; and in placing them, care should be taken that they are not so close to the wire that the birds' tails will rub against the latter, especially, for instance, with a shama, whose tail is abnormal in length. But a bird of that species should not be kept in a wire cage at all, nor should any softer feathered birds, which the insectivorous ones are. Cages with cane or fine wooden bars are much better, for they do not fray and break the feathers like wire ones.

Give the cages, at any rate, a *spring* cleaning, scald them out, repaint and revarnish, if it has already been done in that style.

In the summer time, in fine weather, they can be hung out of doors, but not in the full sunshine for any undue period, since birds in their wild state are constantly shaded by overhanging branches and sheltering leaves, especially in the great heat of mid-day.

Where there is not too much draught they can be

put under the trees of the lawn and garden, so long as cats are not about; but as a rule birds prefer to be hung up not lower than the level of a person's face, for they do not care, as with human beings, to be looked down on.

The really fresh out-of-door air will do them a world of good, and will, when they bathe, dry their feathers much quicker than when in a room. There is a way of talking to one's birds, which perhaps is a particular gift, but when possessed or acquired, makes a large difference to the tameness and behaviour of one's cage pets.

Just as in some gardens, plants will flourish because their owner delights in them individually and understands them, so with the birds. Nothing is done well without trouble, simply because the command of "Six days shalt thou labour" is divine, and therefore the truth.

If we put birds in cages they are denied to a great extent the privilege of obeying that law, and their owners must in consequence carry it out for them.

For nothing labours more industriously than a bird. The work of keeping itself clean, of finding its food, of building its nest and rearing its young, is continuous and unceasing, each in its own turn and season.

The morning, mid-day, and evening hymns of praise are never missed when the time comes for singing; the plan for their existence, I had almost said their redemption, is completely and faithfully carried out.

Birds to those who understand them, and consequently appreciate them, are a privilege which words annot duly express: a very wonderful and a very eautiful part of a wonderful creation.

A gift of the Creator, not lightly to be accepted, or arelessly looked upon.

Amongst the poorer classes there is very often a amentable absence of common sense about keeping ome poor little linnet, canary, goldfinch, or bullfinch n a cleanly state.

Neither is this lack due to an insufficient supply of ʃ, *s. d.*, but rather to that of thought.

It is the bird that may cost a few shillings to buy, nd the seed; but the water is at hand always, and in he country, sand also.

I pity the poor thrushes and blackbirds, especially ı towns, that one sees imprisoned in some dirty, lthy cage.

The poor birds are, more often than not, minus ıils, except for a few broken stumps, and their flight :athers not much better.

The floor of the cage is a nasty, unsavoury smelling ɔllection of dirt and food, and the bird's whole body often encrusted. And that is what our splendid lackbird with his golden bill, his glossy plumage, ıd his broad tail has been brought to. A veritable risoner of Chillon!

In every village any one who loves birds might ffer prizes to their poorer brothers and sisters who eep them, for those that are in the best all round ɔndition; and simple little rules could be printed on

cards, giving practical hints for helping the owners to win such a prize.

Of course the neglect is much worse in some counties and districts than others, for the simple reason that the owners themselves are such imperfect ablutioners.

On the other hand, I have seen blackbirds, jays, magpies, &c., in cottages, or outside them, whose condition were models of neatness and good health; so that it *can* be done; and if it can't, people shouldn't attempt to have any birds. I have gone so far, if it is to be considered as going far, as to preach in church at the children's service upon kindness to birds, and how to keep them; much to the children's interest and pleasure. Certainly in that case I *did* feel I was not preaching what I didn't practise, which is not, one is afraid, always so!

But kindness to animals is part of the gospel, a fact that the Italians do not realise; because, at any rate in Naples, they hold that dumb creatures are not Christians! Consequently they can be bullied and maltreated to any extent.

The example of cleanliness is certainly not set by all the larger bird and animal dealers in London and elsewhere, for the suffocating and evil odours that rush in on one's olfactory nerves on entering one or two well-known shops are simply *horrible*. A lady that I took one day to visit one of these establishments felt so overcome, after five minutes, with the filth of the oppressive atmosphere, that she was forced to beat a hasty retreat, whereby the proprietor lost a good customer.

Coming from such places, is it to be wondered at ıt the birds are affected with typhus fever and other ıtaminating and deadly diseases? It is cruel to :m, and dishonest to their purchasers.

I remember remarking to a dealer who does a large de, that his shop rather stood in need of a spring aning, and received the answer: "Oh, we have no ıe for that sort of thing!"

And now a little about aviaries.

There are those that can be partly indoor ones, ıen attached to and almost part of a conservatory. ıe birds may be seen through the glass, or there ed be merely a wire partition, against which palms d flowers can be arranged.

It depends upon the formation of the conservatory elf and of the house, as to what shape the aviary will ɛe; but if the former is one that runs along part of e wall of the house the latter can be a continuation it, with the flight in the more conspicuous position, d the roosting-house at the other end.

When the aviary is divided from the conservatory glass, the hot pipes can run through, supposing at the aviary is also covered in, and more delicate ɔpical birds, such as tanagers, are kept.

Windows can be made to open, with wire meshing ling the openings.

The water that supplies the conservatory can be rried through, and if a large shallow basin is con- ucted in the centre, into which and out of which ıter can flow, so much the better. In such an aviary would be a pity to keep hardy foreigners; but a

collection of the little fairy-like waxbills of Africa and Australia, lavender finches, small Brazilian and Gould's finches, sun-birds, and other delicacies, would be delightful. Sometimes people have some of the tiniest ones at liberty in the conservatory itself, such as the beautiful little fire finch of Africa, with his sleek little browny-red wife; the well-known St. Helena waxbill, with his slender tail tippeting from side to side, his finely-pencilled mouse-grey body, brightened by a streak of crimson down the centre of the breast, and, enhancing the whole effect, the small crimson beak.

I heard of a lady whose St. Helenas reared several broods successfully, which had their liberty in this way. At first she had great difficulty in inducing them to content themselves with a nesting-box, but at last contrived one which at once suited them. It was a long box, with a division in the centre, in the middle of which was a hole connecting the two compartments thus formed, and a hole in either of these afforded exit and entrance.

The consequence of this construction was, that in one division the nest was built, and in the other the little wee cock bird used to sit where he could see his mate through the inner hole. When she popped out of her compartment to feed, he popped through the hole in the division to take his share of incubating the tiny eggs. Thus four broods were successfully reared in one season.

Amongst the ferns and plants of the conservatory no doubt many a green bug was captured, whereby two birds (not the St. Helenas) were killed

with one stone, for both plants and baby waxbills benefited.

Such minute specimens of bird life would not be in the least harmful to flowers in any way, and flitting amongst palms and bamboos would add greatly to the charm of a well-arranged winter garden.

The orange-cheeked and grey waxbills are smaller than golden-crested wrens, and beautifully neat and compact in their plumage.

They are quite cheap and common in the bird-dealers' shops, but none the less beautiful for that.

And the little Indian avadavats, too ; the male bird rich red, speckled over with seed pearls, and the female warm brown, and less liberally spotted.

Then for the outdoor aviary.

It must be built first.

If you are opulent, you will probably go to a professional builder of such things, but don't leave the plan to him, for it may run the risk of being unpractical and merely showy.

Sometimes part of a garden wall is made use of, with the flights in front, facing the flower garden and the roosting-houses on the other side, perhaps in the vicinity of tool and potting sheds.

A high wall already well grown with creepers is helpful, and doors can be constructed in it, as well as bolt holes as ingress and exits for the birds.

A good foundation should be laid—which advice is not peculiar to an aviary alone—a foundation of concrete, which alone will keep out one of the biggest plagues of life—the rats.

The wire flights must, of course, be firmly and closely secured to the wall by iron bolts, &c., and the supports and framework are best in iron.

It is advisable to leave the floor perfectly clear of encumbrances, partly because it looks better, and partly because the mice, which are difficult to keep out, have less chance of finding a permanent shelter.

The roosting house or houses at the back must be well built; and the roof should have felting between tiles and plaster, to keep it cool in summer and warm in winter. Perhaps it is advisable to feed the birds inside, because the food (seed or insectivorous mixture) keeps dry in wet weather; besides which, the birds are not induced to keep out too much, which, even in the hardest weather, they are very apt to do.

And the food must not be on the ground, nor under any perches, but on a table with legs of a build that will puzzle mice to climb. Outside, any tit-bits that will be eaten up during the day can be placed, along with green food and mealworms.

For the water, if there is a handy supply, it is much better to adopt the plan in the Western Aviaries of the Zoological Gardens of London. Shallow concrete basins with rims, into which the water runs by means of a pipe, right through each pen.

A waste pipe must be constructed to draw the water off each morning, so that the basins can be brushed out.

But they *must* be shallow, at any rate towards the rim, or birds, especially new arrivals in perhaps shabby plumage, will be drowned.

It is always a pleasure to see them gathering round for their morning bath, dipping about at the edge, and finally hopping in to flutter and splash.

Of course the aviaries must be kept scrupulously clean, the concrete floor being swept over once a week, and fresh sand with plenty of fine grit sprinkled evenly about.

Not more than two people should ever be allowed within, namely the owner and the attendant.

It is fatal for the birds' nesting arrangements if those that are strangers to them pry about amongst them.

Birds are particularly sensitive to their presence, and will be quite timid and wild with those to whom they are unused, when they are perfectly tame with one or two whom they see every day, and whose movements, voice, and clothes they are familiar with.

Clothes they notice in a moment.

In constructing an outdoor aviary it is very advantageous to have the eaves of the roosting-house broadened out to such an extent that it forms a real shelter for the birds when they are not within; and these eaves, which add considerably to the artistic appearance of the building, can be supported by posts fixed in the concrete floor of the flights. There can be quite a snug space immediately beneath them, where the projecting timber supports the tiles, under which nesting-boxes can be fixed.

The space thus formed is all part of the flights, and gives shelter both from too hot a sun or from wind and rain.

The height within is 10 feet to the point from where the roof springs; the two outside flights are 10 feet, with a flat roof of wire meshing reaching to the broad eaves, underneath which the height is increased. The middle pen has a semi-circular dome, reaching as far as these eaves, and is 14 feet at its highest point.

In this pen are some glossy ibises, small waders, such as knots, and also plovers.

On either side of them are, in one flight, the parakeets, larger finches, and a few foreign pigeons; whilst on the other are smaller finches and insectivorous birds, such as Pekin and blue robins, Australian finches, &c.

The basin in the concrete floor is larger and deeper for the ibises than it is for the smaller birds.

When broad eaves are built, the food can be placed under their shelter instead of inside the roosting-houses.

The birds come in and out through open windows, which can be closed in very cold weather, and still, of course, admit the light.

The aviaries are built upon ground that slopes towards the south and west; and by a wood, on rising ground immediately behind them, are sheltered from easterly and northerly winds. It is a mistake to overcrowd, because many birds of various kinds are sure to disturb each other, and give less satisfaction in the end; for one of the chief pleasures is to suddenly come across a row of four or five plump young parakeets of some kind or another seated on a perch

outside a nesting-box, before you were scarcely aware that the parents meant business; and these successful broods are often marred by too many inmates, who poke about with inquisitive eyes and meddling bills, spoiling half the fun.

There are meddlesome birds as well as people! And there must be plenty of nesting sites, that is, more than there are pairs of birds that are likely to take notice of them, because what suits one bird doesn't suit another; just as when a married couple are hunting for a house, one that pleases the wife because it has a pretty garden doesn't find favour with the husband because it isn't within anything like a respectable distance of a decent pack of hounds, &c., *ad lib!*

So, too, with budgerigars and cockateels and other couples who have plighted their troth.

The cock bird has evidently set his heart on one particular cocoa-nut or hollow log, and is constantly viewing it, popping in and popping out, and fidgeting backwards and forwards, to which his wife pays very little attention, and promptly goes and lays an egg in exactly the opposite direction, perhaps down in a corner on the floor of the roosting-house; whereat *he* says, "Really these women are beyond a joke," and *she* says, "How selfish men are!" not seeing that *he* was doing his best to choose her the nicest room in the aviary.

And the consequence was—the eggs were addled! and the world said—but that's neither here nor there!

What is more to the point is this.

Have nesting-boxes to suit all shapes and sizes, and scour them thoroughly out after any families have vacated them. For the larger and smaller parakeets logs can be hollowed out by a carpenter, and the open end fastened up with a flat piece of wood about half an inch or more in thickness, cut from the same piece that forms the hollow.

I say the open end, because only one will be so; for the log will be scooped out to a depth of a foot in a piece of wood fourteen inches long, leaving the bottom bowl-shaped, so that when it is placed upright there will be a natural receptacle for the eggs, which will not be able to roll to any edge.

The bowl must be fairly shallow, always sloping gradually from the wooden sides to the centre.

The piece of wood that covers the top (the roof) will be all the better if it projects a little, forming slight eaves, so that, if it be placed in the open, the rain has less chance of penetrating; and if it is painted, there is still more security in this respect.

It can be fastened with a nail to the log, so that it will turn, as on a pivot, for the purpose of examining the nest when necessary, and for cleansing.

Then a circular hole is cut in the side of the nesting-box, according to the proportions of the birds for which it is intended, and a perch can be fixed by it to afford easier entrance. At the back a smaller hole can be drilled, through which the head of the nail on which the log hangs can intrude.

Parrots and parakeets naturally make no nest, but

lay their eggs in some hollow of a branch or tree trunk upon soft chips of rotten wood.

And other birds, too, such as blue robins and small finches, will appreciate these logs, and carry nesting materials into them.

The entrance hole must be five or six inches above the inner base, where the eggs will be laid, or even more." Foreign pigeons and doves, building frail and open nests, require some open foundation, except stock doves, which prefer a hollow tree trunk.

Circular basket lids can be securely fastened to beams and eaves, and slender sticks and fir twigs, as well as heather, will be used by the birds to construct their nests on them. Garden brooms can be firmly wired to the walls in the corners of the roosting-house, with the centres hollowed out, the broom pointing upwards.

Some hay and moss placed in these receptacles may tempt Virginian nightingales, cardinals, &c., to build their house on a firm foundation. But necessity, being the mother of invention, will no doubt, as it arises, produce many an ingenious and original idea to each one in turn who embarks upon the sometimes disappointing yet fascinating pursuit of breeding birds in captivity.

AT CAPRI

CHAPTER XIV

CRUELTY TO BIRDS

"The chief interest of the leisure of mankind has been found in the destruction of the creatures which they professed to believe even the Most High would not see perish without pity."

I HAVE touched upon different ways in which birds are neglected and improperly treated in captivity, but there are many things yet which human beings have to realise more fully and more universally with regard to cruelty.

People of some nations are much more humane to dumb animals than those of others.

Northern nations are fonder of them, as a rule, than southern. But even in England, the country *par excellence* where birds and animals are kept in a superior way, there is much to be corrected and rectified.

Amongst birds in a wild state there is that abominable and ruthless destruction of particular

species, chiefly because there is a demand for their eggs; or because they are themselves rare; or, and this reason is worse still, because the ladies of Europe—and every female is a "lady" nowadays—refuse to relinquish the fashion of wearing the plumes of egrets, birds of paradise, and hundreds of other sorts in their hats, whereby it is said that the males of the great bird of paradise will before long be extinct.

It is lamentable that these lovely creatures are to be wiped off the face of the earth merely to gratify the passing vanity of women, who, in spite of distinct appeals, at least in London, still continue to encourage a really cruel slaughter. The Creator has not peopled the world with birds of marvellous plumage in colours and designs for us to kill them down without a thought for anything but our own personal adornment. "For His pleasure, they are, and were created."

Let me give a particular instance.

The following letter was published in the *Ibis* of January 1900, written from Foochow by Mr. C. B. Rickett, and dated 25th August 1899.

"I am sorry to say that the native 'shooting-men' have at last found out that there is a silver-mine in the 'plume trade,' with the result that one of the greatest ornaments of our landscapes is apparently doomed to destruction.

"It was a pretty sight in the spring to see a stretch of paddy-fields with the brilliant green of the young rice setting off the silvery white plumage of a number of egrets, as they stalked about in search of food. That, however, is now a thing of the past. Last year

the natives got an inkling that money was to be made, and shot a good number of the birds. The prices realised astonished them, and this spring every man who could shoot at all was on the look-out. A terrible slaughter began on the arrival of the wretched egrets, and continued until from Suey Kao, seventy miles up river, to Hing-hua, some sixty miles south of Foochow, the country may be said to have been swept clean.

"I will give you one or two cases only, of all the sickening details told of the massacre.

"A 'heronry' of *Herodias garzetta*, which used in summer to be a beautiful sight from the river, with the white plumage of the birds showing out in strong contrast to the dark green foliage of the two huge trees in which their nests were placed, has been entirely depopulated.

"Further down river was a 'herony' of *H. garzetta* with a sprinkling of *H. eulophotes*, in a village. The local mandarin put up notices warning people against molesting the birds.

"The 'shooting-men,' however, found out that the birds flew in a certain line down a narrow valley to their feeding-grounds.

"Selecting an afternoon with a stiff breeze that not only deadened the reports of the guns, but made the birds fly low, a party of five or six stationed themselves at the end of the valley, and shot down the whole colony.

"One of these men told me that the villagers were very angry because of the bad smell that arose from *the decaying bodies of the nestlings*.

"A native caught lurking about with a gun near a 'herony' in the suburbs of the city was severely bambooed, and had his gun confiscated by the mandarins.

"I asked the man who told me, whether that would protect the birds. He said, 'No, we wait for them outside;' and added, with a chuckle, 'They must come out to feed sometimes.'

"Of course here we cannot do anything in the matter, and it is doubtful whether the new Game Preservation Society started in Shanghai to prevent the export of pheasants' skins, and which I understand intends to include *all* feathers in its field of work, will be able to do much good.

"It is to the CIVILISED WORLD that one must look, and I fear look in vain, for help!"

The hoopoe I have already written a good deal about. It raises one's ire to know that these birds endeavour year by year to find a summer residence in England, and that year by year they are shot on their arrival.

Mr. Kearton has given an account of the persistent persecution of the red-necked phalarope, an uncommon and very dainty little bird of the wader family, which breeds in the far north of the British Isles.

The phalarope's eggs are taken as soon as they are laid, to enrich the purses of the peasant inhabitants, to whom the money is supplied by egg-collectors; and hundreds of sea-birds' eggs are spirited away to meet the same demand. I don't think that boys ought to be allowed to collect eggs merely as a passing whim or fashion.

At Eton in my boyhood it was the fashion to do so, and of course created rivalry, so that each boy strove to outdo the other in both quantity and quality of specimens. And there sat an old woman, almost sacred in memory to all old Etonians of her reign, which was a long one.

Old Mother Lipscombe on her camp stool, with wrinkled face, blear eyes, and croaking voice. In form not unlike a gigantic toad; a much worn and tattered bonnet on her ancient pate.

Day by day in the summer term she squatted near the entrance to the school yard, or by the wall beneath the trees, a pile of boxes at her side on the one hand, and "*Strar*berries and cherries" for the "gentlemen" on the other.

"Any fresh eggs to-day, Mrs. Lipscombe?" came the query from a group of boys; and the old lady would proceed with palsied fingers (that was in the seventies) to lift the lids from off the boxes to disclose her treasures.

A daily supply of the eggs of chaffinches, bullfinches, goldfinches, thrushes, blackbirds, wrens, titmice of different sorts, willow warblers, reed buntings, corncrakes, cuckoos, wrynecks, and others, must have considerably diminished the ranks of these poor birds; with Mother Lipscombe's myrmidons scouring the country side for the space of several square miles.

And a very large quantity of the eggs finally came to nothing. Now, I believe, the birds are very much more protected in the neighbourhood of Eton than formerly, and I trust it is the case. When a boy

shows a really keen interest in the matter, it is a different thing, and a taste to be encouraged ; otherwise let them employ their leisure hours in stamp and other collections, which will bring no harm to economy and beauties of nature. In any case, to buy eggs at a shop is uninteresting and unromantic.

On looking at some boy's collection, you catch sight of some rare eggs, and on asking how he came by them, are told they were bought in London !

Owing to the local protection of birds, there seems to be less taking of eggs by the village boys, for one does not see the festoons of blue and white shells depending on cottage walls, as one used to some thirty years ago. There is much cruelty amongst professional bird-catchers, who entrap hundreds of larks, goldfinches, linnets, &c., and imprison them in miserable little cages in which the poor birds can barely hop about.

And nightingales, too ! which are caught in April when they first arrive, just when their small bodies and minds were beating high with the instinct of the propagation of their species, with the return of spring-time and song.

In order to see the haunts of the London bird-catchers, I penetrated one Sunday morning into the streets of Whitechapel, where on that day the mart is especially busy. One street was so crowded that it was difficult to walk with any ease.

Men in Sunday suits with red cloth ties round their necks, unrelieved by collars, jostled each other, holding one cage or more, usually tied up in coloured handkerchiefs.

Women in varied raiment stood in groups, gesticulating, nodding, chattering, and at times harshly laughing. Some were matrons of stalwart and ponderous figures, arms akimbo, and bonnetless.

Others were factory girls, resplendent in violet or butcher-blue gowns, and yellow or red shawls; their heads surmounted by magnificent broad-brimmed hats, adorned with ribbons and shabby ostrich feathers of painfully brilliant hues.

Children dodged about amongst their elders; some, street arabs of the ordinary shock-headed, bare-footed type; others, whose parents were of the well-to-do order, in gorgeous reach-me-downs, purchased in the Mile End Road.

Many of the windows of the squalid houses were framed in bird cages, and the notes of linnets, goldfinches, chaffinches, and larks made themselves heard through the hubbub of human tongues.

Singing matches were in progress in some of the gin palaces, with champion chaffinches, and bets were evidently being made over the favourites.

Indeed, the general scene was the idea of a third-rate racecourse, where the Upper Ten was conspicuous by its absence.

The sight of all these birds, many of whom had but the day before been flying "o'er the downs so free," saddened me.

The coarse language grated on one's ears.

Yet the general behaviour was perfectly orderly, and the crowded gathering a friendly one.

Still! there were the birds! and one knows that

as a consequence the brilliant flitter of goldfinches' wings, the farmer's friends who eat the thistle seeds, have become more and more scarce, where once large flocks flew twittering over the fields and commons.

Only the strict carrying out of the law can restore them to their former numbers; but at present there is a great deal of talking and very little doing, unless some county magnates happen to interest themselves keenly in the matter, and bestir the county police. In Switzerland birds are much more unmolested, and the laws which produce this effect are, I believe, strict.

In France and Italy the destruction of birds is lamentable and mean; all the more so because large numbers of those that are trapped and *eaten*, are our English migrants, especially when on the autumnal passage—redstarts, robins, thrushes, and other warblers.

At Marseilles I entered a bird shop, presided over by a flaunting lady speaking an appalling French of a cockney order, whose face I did not catch a sight of, owing to the thick covering of paint, and whose hair was coloured a brilliant yellow.

Some of the cages wore veils of calico, which were violently disturbed by the flutterings of birds within. It was mid April, the season of the vernal migration. I lifted a covering, and expected as much.

Freshly caught spring migrants!

Pied flycatchers, yellow and blue-headed wagtails, and blackcaps!

I remarked that they were freshly caught, and that

I thought it very cruel to imprison them on their way to their nesting quarters. My French was *faultless!* Consequently she did not mistake my meaning, but truth was not one of the virtues practised by her. "Oh, mon Dieu! Non! they have been there for a year; they are very tame, only Monsieur is a stranger to them."

The frantic fluttering of the birds belied her words, and their plumage, though frayed a little, was unmistakably that of birds that had not been in that small shop for a year, or a week either.

I said, "Ce n'est pas vrai; bonjour, Madame," and departed.

In Italy one sees most harassing sights.

In Verona, in the picturesque market-place, where the big white umbrellas, like groups of gigantic mushrooms, shelter stalls of many wares and fruit, there are in September, at the time of the autumnal migration, trays full of all sorts of birds, freshly trapped and killed.

I remember seeing quantities of robins and redstarts, as well as titmice, common thrushes, and even blue rock thrushes.

They were sold for eating! and are caught in decoys up in the mountains, regularly constructed for that purpose.

It is said that the Pope [Leo XIII.] takes much pleasure in entrapping small birds in the Vatican garden. If the chief clergyman of Europe does this sort of thing, what are you to expect?

Staying at a private villa at Cadenabbia, I remember seeing in the kitchen one day a large dish, around

ıe edge of which were ranged about twenty little ırds plucked and trussed for cooking.

By their slender black legs and feet I knew at once ıat they were not sparrows.

I asked the cook.

"Pettirossi, Signore," was the answer, "Buonismi." Actually *robins!*

Abominable man to recommend robins to me as ĸcellent eating!

When I told his mistress, she, as an Englishwoman, ras horrified, and gave very decided orders that such a ish was not to appear again in the menu.

In Florence a case of downright cruelty came nder my notice about ten years ago.

Passing a bird shop, I entered in, and after looking bout amongst the birds in the front part, penetrated ›wards the back.

Some ortolans and Citril finches were sitting very ill in a cage, with their heads moving from side to de in an unnatural manner.

I looked more closely.

They couldn't see! Over their eyes there was a hick blister.

In a moment I realised what it was.

By a heated needle or iron they had been blinded, t least for a while, to prevent their fluttering about; nd to the uninitiated they appeared very tame.

I almost flew at the shop proprietor then and there.)h! how I longed to give *his* eyes something which vould at the least discolour them.

Startled at my outburst of heartfelt indignation,

which lent volubility to my Italian, he merely shrugged his shoulders with a deprecatory foreign movement; and I, hurling a final *Diavolo* at him, rushed from the shop.

In Rome a man used to stand at the bottom of the great steps leading to the Church of the Trinità dei Monti from the Piazza di Spagna, with a slight framework hung from his shoulders, on which sat, apparently at liberty, a lot of the pretty little Serin finches, and also goldfinches.

I had looked at these, *en passant*, but one day stopped to examine them more closely.

He usually had one which he used to make hop from one finger to another of either hand. Any one not understanding much about birds, would naturally be attracted by their apparent tameness in the open air.

It didn't take one long to find out two things. First, that their flight feathers were all pulled out; and, secondly, that they were evidently drugged, for to a practised eye it was easy to see that the poor little birds were almost unaware of their surroundings.

Asking the man whether they could fly, he said "Oh yes, but they are very tame; they do not wish to go away," &c., &c.

Then I rent him.

Taking a bird in my hand, and extending its pinion on either side, I said in Italian—

"Can birds fly without wings?"

"Can birds fly that have been given medicine so that they know not where they are?"

The flash of fury that shot into that Roman's eyes was a sight.

Whenever I passed through the Piazza on subsequent days, he would make for me gesticulating and threatening. He was the more angry because several people had gathered round and heard my protest.

But Naples is worse still in its openly cruel treatment of dumb animals, although the English, who sow the seeds of practical Christian humanity wherever they go, have done much to put it down, and the Queen Dowager of Italy herself has long ago taken the matter in hand.

By a lady, who was once one of her ladies in waiting, I was told of Queen Margherita's keen distress when, on visiting a town in her country, the people not merely threw flowers in front of her carriage, but also little birds with their flight feathers drawn, so that they fell fluttering under the horses' feet!

Hundreds of migrants, arriving from Africa in April, are caught in the "environs" of Naples.

Seeing a man by the public gardens with a very large flat cage of cane bars, I walked up to him, and found in it about two hundred blue-headed wagtails; lovely little birds with blue-grey heads, green backs and tails, the latter edged with white, and breasts of a brilliant saffron yellow.

One sees them in winter time in the fields bordering the Nile.

I asked him for how much he would sell me the lot. "Cinque lire, Signore" (five francs), was the answer. I handed him the money.

"Now," I said, "open the cage door."

"But they will escape, Signore."

"That is what I wish them to do," I answered.

The man looked at me as much as to say, "What fools these Inglesi are!"

But he opened the door, and in another minute the whole air was alive with fluttering wagtails, the large majority of which, I believe, escaped.

One poor little bird, weak for want of food, ran feebly over the ground, and was pounced upon by a big tabby cat that was lurking in the neighbourhood.

I questioned the man as to who would have bought them. He answered that people take them, clip their wings, and let them run about in small court-yards and rooms, where they catch the flies.

Perhaps if the Neapolitans were not so dirty there would be less of these pests.

Spending a night on the island of Capri, that rises out of the Mediterranean within the precincts of the bay of Naples, my mind was again disturbed by sights of cruelty.

Riding to the higher parts, I passed a party of Italians, having the appearance of being members of the upper class, each of whom was on a mule or donkey.

One of these poor animals had a large and unsightly sore upon one of his hip bones, and his rider, a fashionably-dressed man, was carefully belabouring the poor beast on the actual sore itself in a really brutal manner with a heavy stick.

Some people think that one small voice in the world does little or no good.

At any rate, I couldn't resist raising mine in protest, and that, too, indignantly.

He flushed up and moved on ; but I did not see the trick used again as long as the cavalcade was in sight.

Continuing my ride on an animal that I had taken care to assure myself had a whole skin, I was very interested to see that all over the island large quantities of redstarts had settled, and were apparently resting before their final arrival on the mainland of Europe. I couldn't help wondering whether any of the individual birds I saw on Capri would in another day or two be flying about in my own garden in England.

Chi lo sa ? as the Italians say. Who knows ? In the small straggling hamlet which climbs towards the summit of the island there were three or four cottages, on the walls of which cages were hung with golden orioles, evidently by their behaviour being newly caught.

I kept my eyes alert for some of these birds at liberty, as well as for hoopoes, but saw none.

The view from the highest point is one of great beauty ; the sea immediately below is of an intense blue, which fades in tone as the eye wanders farther towards the distance, where Naples with its white houses fringes the shore in the heart of the bay.

Behind, the waters stretch to the African coast, sparkling in the sunshine ; in front, the Italian shores curve from the entrance of the bay, and are lost in the haze of the spring afternoon. In the inn, where I

stayed my feet, two men and two girls were dancing the "Tarantella" to the accompaniment of a guitar, played by the Padrona.

On the following morning I explored the other portion of the island, in the vicinity of the famous Blue Grotto. This time I walked, and by myself.

As I was picking my way up a stony path, at my feet there lay a beautiful male redstart, apparently injured.

Stooping to take him in my hand, there came a sudden resistance.

Then I saw that the poor bird was tied by a string. Following it up, I found a man at the other end, seated among some rocks, with a child of about four years old by his side.

The string was tied so tightly round the bird's shoulder and under the wing that it was cutting into the flesh, and the poor thing was sadly mauled.

This inhuman brute was dragging the redstart over the rocks as a plaything for his child, and the expression in the bird's eye was one of faintness and exhaustion.

With difficulty untying the string, which was covered with blood where it had been wound round the shoulder, I saw at once that the bone had been broken, and that it was much kinder to put it out of its misery, which I did. Behind and above the man, stood a huge statue of the Virgin, looking pityingly down upon the scene from a niche in the rocks; a very finely-carved statue, presented to the island by an Englishman.

Cruelty to Birds

[illegible] and two girls were [illegible] to the accompaniment of [illegible]

[illegible] morning I explored a [illegible] Island, to the vicinity of the [illegible] This time I walked, and by my [illegible] my way up a stony path [illegible] by a beautiful male redstart, a [illegible]

[illegible] to take him in my hand, then [illegible]

Then I saw that the poor bird was tied by [illegible] Following it up, I found a man at the [illegible] among some rocks, with a child of a [illegible] by his side.

The string was tied so tightly round the [illegible] and under the wing that it was cutting the flesh, and the poor thing was sadly mangled.

The miserable brute was dragging the poor [illegible] the rocks as a plaything for his child, and the [illegible] sion in the bird's eye was one of faint exhaustion.

With difficulty untying the string, which [illegible] covered with blood where it had been wound [illegible] the shoulder, I saw at once that the bone had [illegible] broken, and that it was much kinder to put it [illegible] its misery, which I did. Behind and above the [illegible] stood a huge statue of the Virgin, looking [illegible] down upon the scene from a niche in the [illegible] a very finely-carved statue, presented to the [illegible] an Englishman.

Redstart

"If your priests," I said, with intense indignation, "taught you kindness of heart instead of your gabbling prayers at the foot of that image, it would be better."

The scene was positively tragic!

Neither did I speak without knowledge.

I had been present in the previous year at a "Canistra," which is the harvest festival of the Roman Church. At a "Canistra," every possible sort of thing is brought to the church of the village, in kind, as an offering for the benefit of the parish priest.

It was at Lenno, a little village touching the shores of the beautiful lake of Como.

A hot Sunday afternoon in September, and the people had gathered in a picturesque crowd on the level grass of the church piazza.

A procession of maidens veiled in white, and carrying lighted candles, wended their way through the open doors, from which the wheezy organ, fitfully played with dance-like music, made itself heard. The congregation was swelling within, and the lights on the altar, with its tawdry lace and artificial flowers, were shining in the semi-gloom of the building. Every moment men, women, and children were arriving, each with an offering.

Some carried cakes, others live geese, tied tightly down into roomy baskets, and ornamented with numerous ribbons; others bore plates of fruit, and sweetmeats; others, vegetables.

Presently there came by a little girl, her head half draped in a bright-coloured shawl, her dark eyes sparkling with excitement, and in her right hand, held

high, a branch of a tree, from the twigs of which, hung by their necks, were perhaps a couple of dozen dead robins! The graceful little figure pushed her way through the crowd, in at the church door, up the aisle to the front of the altar, where her offering was duly received, and where she, like the rest, kissed the glass of a tawdry casket, immediately underneath which grinned the skull of the village saint.

Two priests were standing close to me in the crowd without. I asked them whether they approved of such an offering as had just been proffered.

"Certainly," was the answer; "why not?"

I explained to them how unnecessary and indeed cruel it seemed to an Englishman.

They shrugged their shoulders!

I asked them whether it seemed good for children to be brought up with the idea that God's creatures were intended only for killing and eating.

They answered that all these things have been given for our use, and by their tone and manner plainly showed that they encouraged such destruction.

It is evident that all things being given for our use, doesn't necessarily mean for our mouth and for destruction.

I didn't altogether relish the netting of the quails on Capri, which was in full swing during my visit.

The poor birds, migrating at night, and exhausted with their long flight over the sea, drop into the nets spread all ready to catch them.

This certainly seems a mean trick to play on them,

and thousands on the island of Capri alone thus fall a prey to the demands of London, Paris, and other poulterers.

But it is not quails only that are caught.

It was on my return to Naples on board a steamer that I noticed a large sack lying at the feet of a rough-looking Neapolitan ; a sack of a most lively nature, for the whole of it was in motion, as if it were full of rats.

The neck was tightly secured with string.

Therefore, to gratify curiosity, I asked the owner what was inside.

"Turtle doves," was the answer.

Yes ! it was crammed with turtle doves ; the European species, which arrives as a bird of passage in England in May, and whose soft coo blends so charmingly with the note of the cuckoo and the songs of other birds.

I always associate it with bright days in June, when the great white clouds are floating lazily in the sky, and the scythes are sharpened for the mowing of grass in fields and meadows. Yet how many of these pretty summer doves of ours are deprived of their lives by being intercepted on their journey.

And swallows, too, which are killed on the French and Italian coasts, when they are exhausted on migration ; killed in order to supply women with ornaments for their hats and bonnets.

Amongst Eastern nations there is, at least in Egypt and the Soudan, a curious apathy with regard to an interest in bird life, at any rate amongst the poorer

classes, and a complete indifference to the fact that birds and animals have any feelings.

When they are captured and handled they are treated as if they were devoid of any possibility of suffering. Riding through the fields one day near Minieh, on the banks of the Nile, an Arab came up to us with a wretched sparrow, whose wings had apparently been literally torn from its body, leaving nothing but two mangled stumps, and the poor little bird was tightly tied up with a piece of string.

The only way to impress its captor with the cruelty of the act was to administer some really hard whacks across his shoulder-blades with a stick, which I very promptly did, upon which he retreated at a considerably quicker pace than he had advanced. But I gave chase on my donkey, and didn't let him off easily.

Had I gently conversed with him on the subject, he would only have grinned, and have written me down an ass!

At Luxor it was noised abroad that I was wishing to rear up a brood of hoopoes.

Consequently other birds were brought to the Dahabeah; amongst them a pair of the lovely little green bee-eaters (*Merops viridis*), which are so often to be seen at that part of the Nile, and towards Assouan, either sitting upon the telegraph wires, from which they dart off to catch flies and other winged insects, returning to their perch to devour them, or else amongst the bushes and palm trees of the river's banks or gardens of houses.

They are most gracefully shaped birds, with slender ills and long pointed tails.

Brilliant green, with a lovely golden chestnut in the ight feathers, which is seen when they are on the wing.

Those that were brought me were a pair, evidently ught in their nesting-hole overhanging the river, for eir bills were encrusted with Nile mud, showing at they were preparing a site for their eggs.

They were tied by string round their little stumpy gs.

Knowing that it would be hopeless to keep them, nd cruel; I quietly betook myself to the other side f the Dahabeah, cut the strings, and liberated them cross the river.

Then I returned to the man, and informed him ey were gone.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that I only knew a little rabic, for I am sure that his language was appalling!

But it taught him and others standing by, a prac-ical lesson that I did not want to deprive such birds ither of their liberty or their lives.

The Arabs catch the quails, taking a large bunch f perhaps two dozen birds, tie their legs promiscu-usly and tightly with string, and carry the poor little ellows with their heads hanging downwards. If a nan stops anywhere, he throws his living bundle on he ground, where they lie, many of them bleeding from the rough usage.

It is declared that on some of the Dahabeahs, &c., scullions think nothing of plucking pigeons and fowls alive.

Had I caught our cook-boy at such work I should have pitched him into the river with promptitude.

But Europeans are, not unnaturally, looked upon by the natives as people who want to kill birds, and many make no protest at unnecessary cruelties, which are frequently looked upon as the custom of the country, and only to be expected in those who know no better.

But they can be taught, and are then most kind and thoughtful to dumb creatures.

As soon as our Dahabeah crew discovered my great love for such things, they one and all took pleasure in attending to their wants.

If it was the macaw, he would be the first to receive a piece of sugar-cane as soon as a fresh consignment was brought on board; if it was the gazelle, they would bring anything from off the shore, such as clover, &c., which they thought the little animal would like to nibble at; and by the end of our voyage they had discovered the pleasure of tending to their needs, and of satisfying their hunger.

Easterns have an innate faculty for taming dumb things, and only need to be shown what kindness to them means, to turn them from thoughtless cruelty and ignorant treatment.

To imbue men, women, and children—especially the latter, because it is good to begin early—with a love for birds and animals, is undoubtedly a means of raising the moral tone, as well as of creating an interest in life which will give an impetus to a recreation both refreshing and instructive.

EGRET

CHAPTER XV

STORKS AND CRANES

"To give power, we must have plumes that can strike as with the flat of a sword-blade."

EVERYONE who has been to parts of Holland, Sweden, and Germany, in the spring or summer time, cannot fail to notice the white storks; so conspicuous in the choice of their building sites, on the top of roofs, chimneys, and, in some instances, poles, on which have been placed cart-wheels or platforms, as foundations for their big nests of sticks.

In the end of March or the commencement of April the storks return from their winter quarters in Egypt, India, &c., and every one knows how fortunate the

peasants of European countries consider themselves when a pair of these birds select any particular house as their nesting-home.

Every one, too, knows how the German parents tell their children that the storks bring the babies.

In England, as, alas! there *are* no storks, different little harmless inventions are resorted to.

Like the hoopoe, the stork is probably another instance of a bird which would still come regularly to the British Isles if it were not so persistently shot as soon as one puts in an appearance.

It may be argued that England being so much more drained and cultivated, where formerly there was marshy ground, is a sufficient reason for the disappearance of the white stork.

Long years ago it probably was a regular summer resident.

But about the marshes of Lincolnshire, the fens of Cambridgeshire, and the Norfolk broads, not to mention other localities, there is undoubtedly ground on which the storks would find a good supply of food in the shape of frogs, fish, mice, &c. Hardly a year goes by without one hears of one or two storks being shot.

In Poole Harbour—about 1880, if I remember right—three were seen together, one of which was shot by Mr. Hart, of Christ Church, and its skin is still to be seen, beautifully mounted, as an addition to one of the most splendid collections of stuffed birds in the kingdom.

I believe it is Mr. Hart who tells an interesting

story about a stork that was marked and also "made in Germany," although I did not hear the anecdote first hand.

At any rate, it may be said, that a German put a ring upon a stork's leg, marking on the ring the place where it was hatched, and the bird was allowed to fly.

Away he went at the migrating season, and in the following spring returned again.

How they managed to catch him, I don't know; he may have been very tame and have walked into an outhouse, or anything of that kind.

On looking at the ring, or it may have been a second one, these additional words had been engraved: "Friends in Bombay greet friends in Berlin" (supposing Berlin to have been the place where the bird was originally marked).

This story was, so I understood, told to Mr. Hartert by a German who was visiting his museum.

Having suffered from the way in which my tame storks have been shot, which I have time after time allowed to have their full liberty, I feel all the more keenly the foolish and wanton destruction of these birds, and other rare ones.

It is always interesting to try experiments with birds by allowing them in semi-captivity their full liberty; and this I have done with white storks for several years. Purchasing them as nestlings, or almost so, in Leadenhall Market, generally in the beginning of June, when they are too young to fly; I take care to ask beforehand that their flight feathers shall not be clipped. Sometimes they are such babies, that for

three or four days after their arrival they cannot even stand up on their wobbling legs, and when they do at last manage it, they rock about and stagger in the weakest way.

Voracious things they are too at that age, and gollop down raw liver to any extent, making a curious rasping, wheezing noise as they do so.

I always put them on the open lawn so that they may become used to the look of the place before they can fly.

In a short time they begin to gain strength.

At this age the feet are light reddish, but the legs are dull brown, and do not become red until the later portion of the summer.

The bills, too, instead of being red, are almost black, except for a promise of the future colour at the base. And so my young storks march solemnly about, bending down their bodies when they are hungry, and flapping their weak wings up and down.

When there are one or two adult birds amongst them, the babies run after them persistently, in the hopes of receiving a frog or a locust. How should *they* know that these are not their parents, and that they have left them across the sea?

Then comes a day when they begin to exercise their wings a great deal; hopping along on both feet, flapping and pirouetting.

And then—at last they find the use of them. Away goes the biggest and the strongest, as yet unversed in the art of steering.

He takes a low flight out into the park; and,

With the fine sweep of their wings, they would mount up to a great height in a very few minutes, and many a day did I think I had seen the last of them.

Sometimes when there was a light breeze, they would sail far above the house, with outstretched and apparently unmoving pinions, looking no larger than rooks.

And away they would go in ever widening circles, until they were at times hidden by the clouds. I have watched them through field-glasses, soaring for long distances from home, yet they never settled anywhere but on the house itself, or on the lawn, or the part of the park immediately fronting the house.

To a pond in the park they were very fond of going; but if I whistled to them at their supper time, one after the other, they would rise up to come flapping home.

In 1899 I bought some silver rings, on which I had the year and the name of their English home engraved, and slipped one on to an ankle of each bird.

This was not easy, for the ring must not be too large for the stork's leg, and yet large enough to go over his foot.

Of course one might have them made with a snap which would close for ever, when shut to; but it would be a more costly business.

So I managed, by putting vaseline on the birds' feet, and thus slipped the rings over.

That year one of the young storks arrived with a broken wing, and had to be taken to the hospital, which was really the drying-ground of the laundry. And a professional nurse was in attendance—she happened to be with us at the time—who bound up the broken wing with the tender care of one whose heart was naturally a soft one for all wounded creatures, human or dumb.

For some days the bird seemed to be a rather refractory patient, for he constantly managed to struggle about and peck the bandages loose.

At last the bone seemed to have joined, but the wing for a long time drooped at the shoulder, and the bird, unable to fly, looked yearningly up at his brothers as they sailed over his head.

But one day he managed to get on the wing, and although he was rather a lop-sided kind of a boat; still he went along fairly well, at no great height from the ground.

When his fellows left, he, poor bird, had to stay behind, but during September his wing seemed to grow stronger, until at last he too soared round at great heights; and, by dint of perseverance, to be imitated by many a *malade imaginaire*, finally was lost to sight in the far, far distance of a clear September sky, soaring round in ever-widening circles, until his bearings were ascertained.

Let us hope he reached the land of pyramids and temples in safety; where in the marshes of the Soudan he could join that mighty host of comrades.

As he winged his way out of sight, it seemed like some mysterious departure of a spirit, seeking a sunnier and a better clime.

Would my storks ever return in the spring-time to the old English home? What a triumph if they did!

That year I really believe they all four left England's hostile shores in safety, for although I looked carefully in the obituary column—I beg its pardon, I mean the natural history notes of the *Field*—where more than once I have seen the slaughter of my storks recorded, there was, to my great relief, no announcement that any white storks had been shot.

In other years, as sure as fate, about a week or a fortnight after my storks had left for their winter quarters, I was sure to see—"A white stork shot in Kent," or somewhere else. And wouldn't I have enjoyed peppering the legs of the sportsman who did the deed!

On one occasion one of my storks was resting on a chimney of a farmhouse in Kent, before crossing the Channel, and the farmer came out and knocked him over with a gun-shot.

My storks of 1899 *may* have met with the same sad fate; and any one who killed them, finding the silver rings on their ankles, would perhaps have been too ashamed to make the matter public. "Speriamo di no," as the Italians say.

No doubt, if they are, on the other hand, safely somewhere in the neighbourhood of Fashoda, the other storks will believe them to be princes in disguise when they see their silver anklets.

A really lovely sight is the vernal migration of battalions of storks, as they wend their way from the Soudan along the course of the Nile from about the end of February to the end of March.

A first vanguard passed over Assouan on the 22nd of February 1899, composed of perhaps two or three hundred birds.

And all through March, about every fourth or fifth day, companies would come wheeling from the south, on their way to their nesting-homes in Europe and Asia.

But on the 20th of March of the year I was up the Nile, the whole sky over Assouan was, as far as the eye could see, southwards and northwards, filled with countless hundreds of these birds.

Against the wonderful brilliancy of the Egyptian sky, battalion after battalion, company after company, came wheeling along, their red legs and bills against the azure background, and their shining white plumage, with the broad black pinions, showing out in strongest contrast of colours. They did not always fly at any very great height; indeed, many were below the level of the surrounding hills.

Neither did they fly straight ahead, but wheeled and sailed in magnificent curves and circles, crossing and recrossing each other, several hundreds flying one way; and others, another.

The effect was enhanced by the absolute silence that reigned amongst them, which lent dignity to an already dignified procession.

Storks are mute vocally, and give vent to a call by

clattering their mandibles loudly and rapidly together. But I have never heard them do this when on the wing.

This great procession of the 20th of March seemed to be the finale of all that had gone before—a magnificent accumulation of a full army corps. This beautiful flight of birds must have continued for at least an hour.

When they arrive in Europe they gradually separate into smaller companies, and finally into pairs. They are most useful birds in devouring the locusts, on which they feed their young, in places where those insects are indigenous.

I remember being told by a very keen and well-known naturalist how, when he was sitting quite close to a stork's nest (it must have been in some part of Asia) the old birds came near him fearlessly, constantly bringing locusts to the young birds.

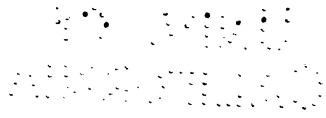
It is curious that the black stork should be so much more unsociable in the choice of his nesting places, as far as human beings are concerned.

But in winter one sees small companies of them wading in the shallows of the Nile, or standing in groups of a dozen or so upon some spit of sand in mid-river, accompanied by spoonbills, egrets, ruddy sheldrakes, and Egyptian geese.

It is a very great pity that the birds of the Nile should be shot at as they are, principally, it would seem, by Greeks and Germans.

Of course those unsightly steamers with their obtrusive "wash" in attendance, have helped a great

FLYING STORKS



deal to drive away the waders and ducks of various species, but a constant persecution at the hand of Europeans has lamentably lessened their numbers.

I remember how anxious my Syrian dragoman was to have a shot from our Dahabeah at a griffon vulture, which was floating down stream on the carcase of a dead donkey.

But I indignantly forbade such useless slaughter of a most useful bird.

Its dead body would have floated away to be, in its turn, the same sort of stuff as that on which it was feeding.

Let us hope that stringent laws will be made, *and carried out*, for the protection of birds and animals in the Soudan.

People say that there are *thousands* of such and such a bird.

Yes ! no doubt there are !

But there are also thousands of a kind of tourist, who, without any real interest in collecting bird-skins for scientific purposes, bang away at everything they see.

There used to be thousands, to use a *façon de parler*, of buff-backed herons all along the Nile. In the winter of 1899, though I was constantly spying at every bird I saw, through my glasses, I should think that fifty was the limit of these birds' numbers.

We came across them only very occasionally. My dragoman told me that he remembered the fields white with them some thirty years ago. Yet one of the

most interesting touches to the scenery of the great river of Egypt are the birds.

Birds which are alive to-day figure upon the walls of temples built 3500 years ago.

On the walls of Dehr-el-Bahari, the way in which the different species of birds are drawn and coloured is most striking, and there is no mistaking ducks of various kinds, notably the pintail; as well as geese, ibises, herons, and cranes.

Now, the sacred ibis is an inhabitant of Egypt no more.

The modes in which different birds were captured and secured is shown clearly at the temple of Queen Hatepsu just mentioned.

Cranes, for instance, could peck as much in the days of the ancient Egyptians as they can now.

Consequently their bills were tied down to the front of their necks, with a cord passing round the neck itself.

The different kinds of cranes are extremely ornamental in captivity, from the graceful little demoiselle, with its pretty white ear tufts, to the great grey Sarus crane of India, or the black and white Mantchurian, immortalised on Japanese screens, cabinets, and porcelain.

Personally, my experience of cranes as pets has been limited to the European, the Sarus, the Australian "companions," Demoiselle, and White Siberian.

Will people wonder that I sometimes entertain bitter feelings towards those who shoot *raræ aves*, amounting in one instance to anger, hatred, and malice,

when I record the following story about my Sarus cranes.

They were a magnificent pair of birds, which used to walk with stately gait about the park ; and, having only the primaries of one wing clipped, when they moulted and grew new feathers, soon managed to fly.

I tried to catch them, but I was placed on the horns of a dilemma.

Either catch them, in which case the new feathers would not be sufficiently grown to cut with any due effect, or leave the feathers to grow long enough, in which case one wouldn't catch them.

And the latter came to pass.

So these great birds used to take flights round the park, their enormous pinions flapping along. As the feathers grew, their flights became longer, and they went farther afield.

But they always returned home ; at least they did so until they didn't ; which seems to happen with a good many things in this life!

When at last it came about that the cranes were absent a whole twenty-four hours, search and inquiry was made for them in the immediate neighbourhood.

It was reported that at a farm about three miles off they had been shot.

What epithets are strong enough for that farmer who did the deed ?

The report was only too true.

The cranes had settled, and were feeding with the poultry in a field close to the farmhouse. The dunder-headed farmer, who merely remarked that

he thought they were "Molly Ur-rns"—by which he meant herons—went indoors, seized his gun, and murdered both my poor cranes then and there. Being absent at the time, I wrote to remonstrate with him, but never even received an answer to my letter, much less an apology.

He lived near Princes Risborough, in Buckinghamshire. If any man deserved to be peppered through his gaiters, he did; and I honestly confess it would have given me the keenest satisfaction to have done it! Exactly the same thing happened with a pair of my white storks.

It was in May, and having kept them in with unclipped wing feathers all the winter, liberated them when I thought the vernal migratory instincts had died down.

Much clattering of mandibles took place, and the male bird several times carried sticks about in his bill.

But a big storm came on, during which, whilst on the wing, the storks were swept along in the teeth of the gale, and settled in a meadow only two miles from home.

The next view I had of them was in a farm cart, in which one was lying dead, and its mate so wounded that it did not survive more than a day or two.

Here again was an instance of one of that class of farmers, who love to prowl about with a gun, banging at everything in the shape of a wild bird or animal that is seen.

A gun, with crass ignorance behind it, is a nasty weapon. In this instance also, it was pleaded that they were mistaken for "urns"; though why, even then, they should have been slaughtered, I fail to understand. There was no trout stream to protect.

And to think they were herons, must have meant that he knew more or less what those birds are like.

Whoever saw herons with snow-white plumage, black wings, and red legs and bills!

To the bucolic mind of that class of farmer apparently any biggish bird that owns long legs and bill is an "urn," and must consequently be shot.

In August (1900) five white storks, which had remained at home during the summer, were ruthlessly shot by a local doctor when, on crossing out of Berkshire to the sea for their migration, they settled to rest on the tower of the Gosport waterworks. Although I twice wrote to ask for an explanation and to remonstrate, I received no answer!!

On these occasions, insult is certainly added to injury!

After the murder of my Sarus, I purchased a splendid pair of Australian "native companion" cranes, as they are called.

Closely resembling the Sarus, they are not quite so tall, and their colouring is perhaps a grey of a softer and more pearly tint. They have the same bare head, covered with scarlet papillose crustations on the skin, and black bristles.

[illegible] coloured pouch at the throat becomes [illegible] in the spring time.

The male bird is always taller than the female, [illegible] generally walks with his head more erect. The characteristics of the two sexes are evident in the case of my Australian cranes.

They are very tame—indeed visitors sometimes wish they were wilder; and whilst the hen bird walks along with shorter steps, her skirts hanging downwards, in the shape of elongated feathers of the wings, her head coquettishly on one side, he strides round, taking a wider circle in his walks, with long jerky steps, erect and tall, his bright brown-red eye looking unutterable defiance.

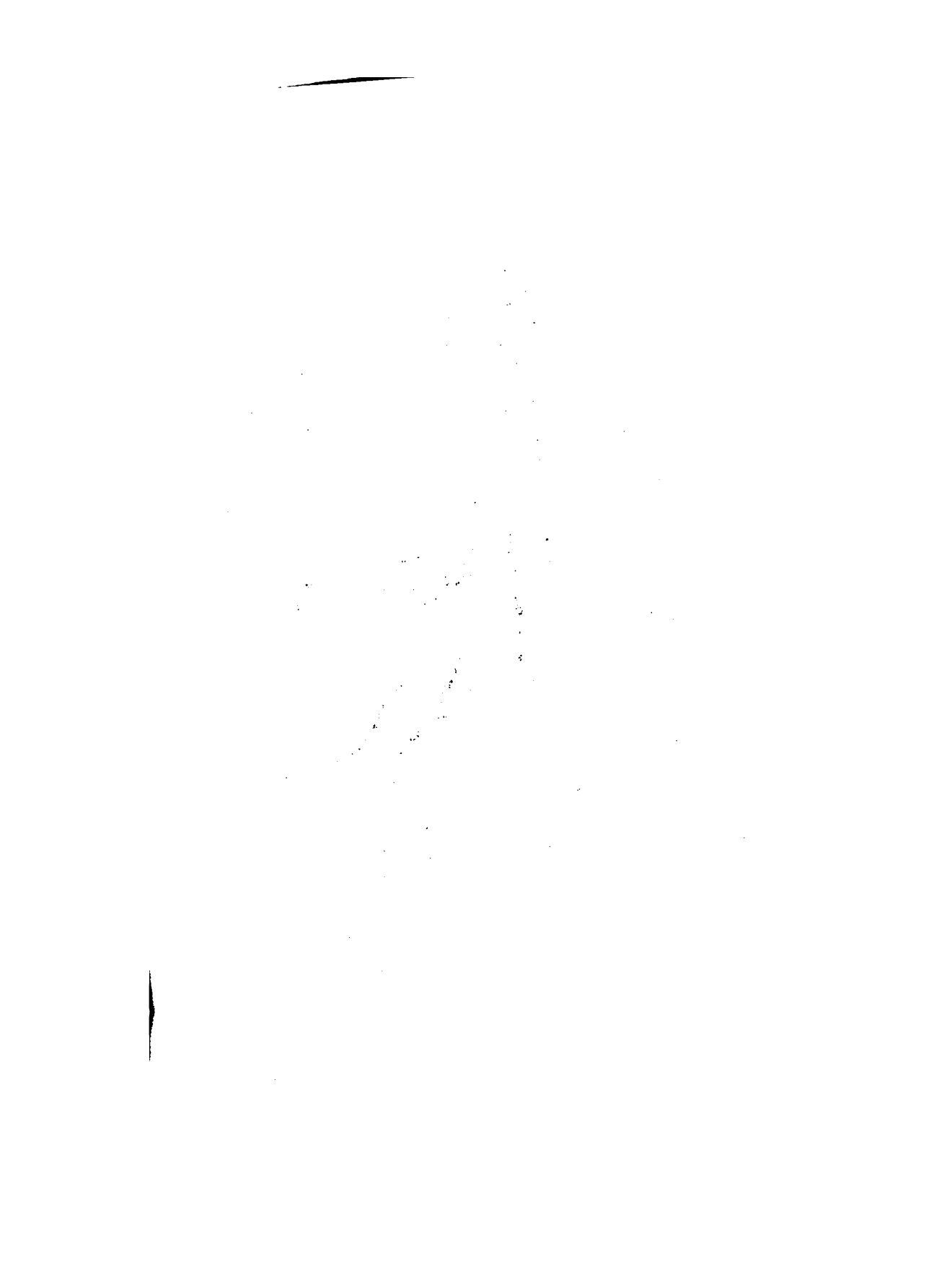
If you remain long enough to gaze at them, the lady will gradually sidle closer and closer, at the same time her mate draws nearer to you on the other side; when, at an apparently given signal, they will suddenly attack you with [illegible] hard pecks from their bills, flapping their big wings to disconcert you.

One of my legs received a hard pinch on occasion.

But there was something that roused their ire more than anything else.

That was their first sight of a lady on a bicycle.

What *would* they think of the ladies of to-day? Their bare —— well! that portion of their limbs that ought to be covered with stocking and petticoats, which very often is not, would afford a fine target for the cranes' onslaughts!



If it wasn't that I should blush to be seen walking with them in such an unwomanly undress, I should enjoy showing some of them round the park, in the vicinity of my Australian cranes! Perhaps it might induce them to give up making a spectacle of themselves to the world at large. However, one is thankful that our English women have naturally shrunk from such an unwomanly garb (although they too, in some instances, might be more clothed in the *upper* portion of their persons), and in the instance I am speaking of there really was no need for the cranes to be so indignant.

Two English ladies, bicycling in all modesty of dress and demeanour, were learning to find a steady seat on their saddle, when, passing along the road, they met my cranes.

In a moment those pugilistic birds, with a flank movement, had attacked the first fair rider. The next scene was—bicycle and rider flat on the road, and the cranes dancing with outstretched wings and aggressive bills on the top of them! But, before any harm was done, they were routed by another lady, who was walking close by, and who bravely charged them and belaboured them with her parasol!

After this every one will agree that cranes are most charming pets.

They invariably give vent to a loud duet of resonant trumpeting, especially if any one stops to look at them and then turns to walk away. The hen bird is always the first to throw up her head in the air, with a loud rattling croak, which is immediately caught up

by her mate, who, while she continues to croak, utters his trumpet calls, which, when the wind is blowing towards me, I have heard distinctly at a distance of two miles, and this, too, when they have been on the high ground of the Chiltern Hills, and I in the level vale below. These loud notes were always preceded by a low inward growl.

The male always lowers his wings, shaking them up and down in time with his trumpetings, and both birds stand close together with their beaks pointing upwards.

When they are separated, especially at night and in foggy weather, they call to each other with one loud monosyllabic croak.

They are evidently extremely attached to one another, and in a wild state pair for life.

The crane's cry is exceedingly wild, and one can understand how fine it must sound on their native plains and marshes.

A very splendid member of this magnificent family of birds is the white crane of Asia, with the red skin of the face, black primaries, and pink legs.

The Mantchurian, or Japanese crane, will breed in captivity, and is a splendid ornament on the margin of a lake.

But unless you *happen* to want several begonia plants taken up, don't let cranes into the flower garden.

If, however, you are short of labourers in the autumn, when your bedding plants have to be taken up for the winter, they might be useful, for they will

uproot a large bed of geraniums in double-quick time.

They are better at this kind of work than at planting anything.

When I first had my native companions, they worked away splendidly at some begonia beds, but unfortunately their zeal and labour was mistaken, for it happened to be in June. They may have been like we were in childish days: anxious to see whether the plants were rooting nicely!

And so my cranes were politely shown the garden gate, which was carefully closed behind them. For the future they had to be content with digging up bits of turf in the rougher grass of the park.

The Stanley crane of South Africa is extremely quaint and graceful, with its pearl-grey plumage, its curious puffed head, and its elongated feathers of the wing, which almost touch the ground.

Then there is the crowned crane (balearic) of the northern region of Ethiopia, with its wonderful buff-coloured shaving-brush on the back of its head, and rich chestnut of the secondaries of the wings, set off by the white of the wing coverts, and dark grey of the other parts.

It was, I think, a crane of this species that was taken by Colonel Smith-Dorrien from the compound of the Khalifa's house in Omdurman, after the great battle of 1898, and sent to Tresco Abbey. The demoiselle is the smallest of the family. A crane often seen in the beautiful Japanese drawings

is the "tan-cho"—a very handsome bird with grey plumage and white on the back of the neck and throat; the wing-quills and tail being black.

As far as food goes, cranes are more convenient to keep than storks and herons of different kinds, as the latter need animal food, such as cut up rats, liver, greaves, &c.—not always pleasant, especially in hot weather; whereas the cranes will do well on large grain, pieces of bread, and soaked dog biscuit. Flamingoes are beautiful in a collection of the larger waders, but are more difficult to keep in health; for they need shrimps to a certain extent, but boiled rice will suit them as a staple diet.

One of the most wonderful sights in wild bird life is a flock of flamingoes, with their delicate rosy plumage, and long spindle legs of pale pink, as they stand in soldier-like ranks in the shallows of some mud flat or lake. As one steams along the Suez Canal it is an inspiring sight.

One morning the early light of an Eastern dawn was breaking in through my open port-hole; and, rising from my berth, the delicious air of the desert blew refreshingly into one's lungs.

The whole sky was of a pale golden yellow, deepening to rose colour, where the sun was about to rise, but of a clear transparent smalt blue towards the west. A pearly grey and gold light shimmered over the sand and the shallow waters of the great lake, which verges on the banks of the Canal.

In the deliciously clear atmosphere a long line of flamingoes, with their necks and legs outstretched,

flapped over the still surface of the waters; their pink forms reflected in the mirror beneath them.

Their loud gaggling cries sounded weirdly in the stillness of this beautiful dawn. Then the sun rose, mounting rapidly above the horizon, and in a moment flooded the scene in a glory of bright gold; whilst the stars, which had to the last scintillated and shone where the sky still carried the blue tints of night, now paled and went out in the presence of a greater glory.

And as the rays struck over the earth's surface, they lit up the ranks of flamingoes as they stood like companies drawn up in battle array, in uniforms of rosy pink. In the farther distance, what seemed to be a row of one-storied Eastern houses made of plaster, painted a pale saffron yellow, and built apparently in the middle of the great stretch of waters, was a large flock of pelicans, as it proved to be on closer examination through my glasses.

The atmosphere caused them to look even larger than they really were, and they were sitting compactly gathered together in a great company; producing the effect described.

The golden light shone on their white breasts.

Once a great company flew overhead, as we sailed up the Nile in a Dahabeah, when the sun was setting below marvellous ruby-red clouds, flecked over a sky of clearest sea-green. And *again* the sun's rays shone on the pelicans' breasts, as backed in the east by a sky of deep blue, which was tinged with the shades of approaching night, the great boat-billed birds flapped

high above us in wonderful riband-like lines, which waved and undulated like some giant pennon of black and amber.

Or else it might have been a monstrous serpent of the air, so closely and evenly did each individual bird keep its place behind the one immediately in front of it.

Yet the whole company waved continually as it moved; at one moment the black pinions darkening the line; at another their white breasts, amber coloured in the light of the setting sun, flashing out.

And so they wended their way towards the radiance of the western sky, as if unwilling to allow the shades of night to overtake them.

* * * * * *

Such a radiancy of glory,
Shining in the west,
Telling us the welcome story
Of the final rest;
And the rising on the morrow
Of the sun's glad light,
Promises that pain and sorrow
Pass away with night.

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THE END

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
Edinburgh & London

Astley, H.D.
My birds in freedom and captivity.

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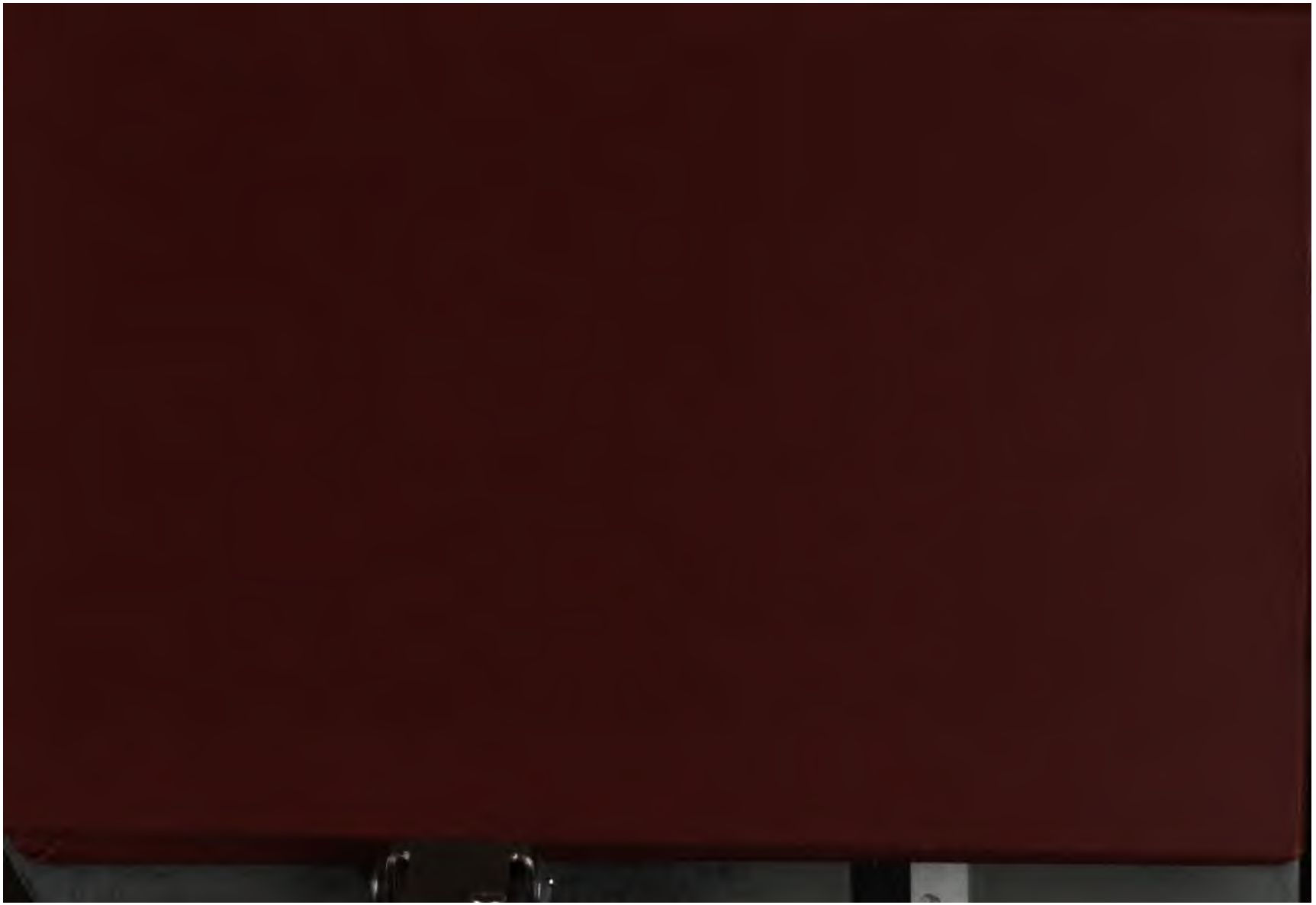
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